Where the Checkered Flag Stands

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Where the Checkered Flag Stands

by Aristosimppp

Summary

Stanley Snyder was at the peak of his career — the fastest, fiercest name in Formula 1. Every race was his stage, every victory his crown. But one crash changed everything. During his recovery, far from the roaring engines and flashing lights, he met a stranger who saw him not as a legend, but as a man. And for the first time, Stanley began to question what truly mattered — the race he lived for, or the heart he'd almost forgotten he had.

Notes

Yes uploaded another one but not gonna make sure there would be an update everyday... Also I was gonna do a kidou yuuto fic but I got an idea for this two again.

Chapter 1: The Noise Beneath the Silence

The roar of the engine was a sound Stanley Snyder could never get tired of.
It wasn't just noise — it was a language. A pulse that spoke only to him, drowning out everything else: the cameras, the lights, the expectations, the family name that followed him like an unwanted tattoo.

Silverstone was half-shrouded in morning fog, the kind that carried the smell of wet asphalt and fuel. The track was slick, gleaming faintly beneath the pit lights as the McLaren crew moved like clockwork around the orange-and-black car. Stanley stood apart from them, helmet tucked under one arm, the faint chill of dawn brushing against his neck. His suit was zipped halfway, showing the base layer clinging to his skin, the McLaren emblem sharp against his chest.

Someone once said he looked too calm before a race. "Dead behind the eyes," a commentator had joked once. They weren't wrong — he was calm, but not because he didn't care. He just knew that emotion had no place on the track. You drive, or you die. Everything else could wait.

"Stanley," came a voice through the intercom. His engineer, Lucas. "We're running simulations for the tire compounds. Wet track's still a variable. You sure about going softs for the first stint?"

Stanley didn't answer right away. He walked closer to the car, eyes tracing the curves of carbon fiber, the way the raindrops rolled down the nose cone like silver tears. "Yeah," he said finally. "Softs. I'll make it work."

"Copy that," Lucas sighed, his tone half-amused, half-defeated. "You always say that."

Stanley smirked. "And I'm always right."

He climbed into the cockpit, slid the helmet on, and for a moment — just before the world muted itself into mechanical stillness — he let his eyes close.
There it was again. That feeling he could never explain to anyone — the moment before the storm, where everything inside him aligned.
On track, he was not the son of billionaire William Snyder, CEO of Snyder Industrial Holdings. Not the disappointment who traded boardrooms for podiums. Not the family's shame.
He was just Stanley.

And that was enough.

By noon, the qualifying sessions were done. He'd landed P3 — not pole, but close enough. The garage erupted in handshakes and pats on the back, yet Stanley's expression never changed. He walked off before the press could swarm him. He hated that part — the noise, the questions, the fake smiles.

He could already hear the reporter's voice in his head: "Stanley Snyder! Third on the grid, another strong performance. How does it feel?"
It always sounded the same. And so did his answers.

"Feels good."
"The team did great."
"We'll see tomorrow."

Everything rehearsed. Everything detached.

The PR manager caught up with him halfway to the paddock. "Stanley, media wants five minutes before you head out—"

He shot her a look that said don't push it.
"Later," he muttered, brushing past her.

He lit a cigarette outside the paddock gates, ignoring the cameras that weren't supposed to be filming there. He knew the photos would be all over social media by evening. Stanley Snyder — the cold-hearted McLaren star.
Let them talk. The headlines didn't matter as long as he was winning.

He pulled his phone from his pocket, glancing at the dozens of unread messages. Sponsors. Team emails. A few from his manager. And one from his mother.

Mother: Your father saw the interviews again. You could at least pretend to care about the company.

He didn't reply. He never did.

The Snyder family was an empire — steel, aviation, real estate. Built on precision and power. To them, racing was a hobby, not a career.
When Stanley turned down his seat on the board at twenty-two, his father said nothing. The silence was worse than anger.

He'd grown up surrounded by marble floors and unspoken expectations. Piano lessons. Corporate dinners. Tailored suits.
And he had hated every second of it.

The first time he drove — really drove — was at sixteen, when he stole one of his father's cars from the garage and took it around the city outskirts. He crashed it into a fence two hours later. His father didn't yell. He just looked at him like he'd wasted something precious.

Stanley remembered saying, through a split lip and shaking hands, "At least I didn't crash the company."
He got grounded for a month.
But he never stopped driving.

Now, sitting in his hotel room that evening, Stanley stared at the city lights from his balcony. London shimmered in the distance, alive and endless. Below him, traffic crawled like fire ants. He took a sip of whiskey, his other hand absently turning a small silver keychain between his fingers — a keepsake, shaped like a winged emblem.

He'd been given that keychain years ago, during a visit to NASA for a McLaren crossover event. It wasn't official merch — just something handed to him by a quiet man with white hair and dark eyes, who'd talked to him about aerodynamics like it was poetry.

Dr. Xeno Wingfield.

Stanley remembered that name, though he wasn't sure why. Maybe because it was the first time someone spoke to him without expecting something in return.

The two of them had met once more, years later, when McLaren consulted Wingfield on a new energy recovery system. Stanley had been there during testing. Xeno hadn't recognized him at first, but Stanley had remembered the voice instantly — calm, deliberate, sharp.
He'd liked that voice.

He turned the keychain in his hand again. It gleamed under the hotel light. He didn't know why he still kept it. Maybe because it reminded him that somewhere out there, there were people who lived for something other than profit margins.

The doorbell rang.
Stanley frowned, setting down the glass. He wasn't expecting anyone.

It was his father.

William Snyder stood in the doorway, every inch the image of control — silver suit, polished shoes, the faintest smell of cigar smoke. His presence alone made the air heavier.
"Still the same old room," he said, looking around the hotel suite with a disapproving glance. "Barely looks lived in."

Stanley folded his arms. "That's because I live on tracks, not in hotels."

"Apparently." His father's voice was calm, but cutting. "P3 isn't bad. But not P1 either."

Stanley exhaled sharply. "You came here just to say that?"

William ignored him. He walked to the window, looking down at the city as if it were another one of his acquisitions. "You know, every other racer would have used the Snyder name to build something bigger. Sponsorships. Media deals. Legacy."
He turned, his gaze hard. "You could've led the company by now, Stanley. You had the education. The connections."

"I didn't want it."

"That's not the point."

“It is the point,” Stanley snapped, his voice rising for the first time. “You wanted a puppet. I wanted a life.”

For a moment, silence. Only the faint hum of the city below. Then his father said quietly, “A life that ends at two hundred miles per hour.”

Stanley clenched his jaw. “At least I’m not dead inside while living it.”

The words hit harder than he intended. William’s expression didn’t change, but something flickered behind his eyes — hurt, or maybe regret, quickly buried under steel.

“You’ll regret it someday,” his father said, heading toward the door. “The world doesn’t remember racers. It remembers those who build it.”

“And yet,” Stanley said, his voice calm again, “you came all this way to see one.”

His father stopped, hand on the doorknob, but didn’t reply. When the door finally closed, the silence felt heavier than before.

Later that night, Stanley sat at the edge of his bed, scrolling through the F1 headlines.

“Snyder Secures Third in Silverstone Quali.”
“McLaren’s Cold Prince Strikes Again.”

He skimmed through the comments, the endless chatter about his demeanor, his arrogance, his lack of PR polish.

One caught his eye:

“*He drives like he’s got nothing left to lose. Maybe that’s why he wins.*”

He didn’t know whether to laugh or agree.

He tossed the phone aside and lay back, staring at the ceiling. The world saw him as confident, untouchable — the man who didn’t flinch, didn’t care. But under all the noise, there was still that sixteen-year-old boy who loved the wind more than applause.

The hum of engines still echoed faintly in his mind. It was the only sound that made sense.

He closed his eyes, and in the quiet dark, he thought again of that keychain — the small wing-shaped emblem resting on his bedside table.

For some reason, he thought of Xeno’s voice again. Calm. Certain.

“You drive like you’re searching for something,” Xeno had said once, years ago. “Do you ever find it?”

He hadn’t answered then.
He still didn’t know the answer now.

The next morning, the pit lanes were chaos again. Mechanics swarmed, photographers flashed, engines screamed to life. The scent of burnt rubber filled the air.

Stanley walked through it all with his usual detached calm, every step precise. Helmet under his arm. Sunglasses hiding the tiredness in his eyes. The world loved his composure, but none of them saw the quiet war beneath it.

As he reached his car, a crew member handed him a comms earpiece. “Strategy meeting in five, Snyder. Lucas wants you there.”

“Tell him I’ll be late,” Stanley said, slipping into the cockpit.

The crewman frowned. “You’re skipping briefing again?”

“Yeah,” Stanley said. “I already know how to win.”

He started the engine. The car came alive beneath him — a mechanical beast growling in approval.
And as the world’s noise faded away into that familiar hum, Stanley Snyder smiled — the only real smile he ever gave.

Because here, behind the wheel, nobody could tell him who to be.

Chapter 2: The Man Behind the Silence

Chapter Notes

I know i said no everyday update but can't blame me i had a 2 to 3 chapters prepared.

The morning after race day was always quiet — eerily so.
No cameras, no fans, no roaring engines. Just the low hum of machines being dismantled and the smell of oil and burned tires clinging to the air.

Stanley liked this version of McLaren's headquarters — stripped of the show, reduced to steel, glass, and precision.
It was the only kind of silence he could stand.

He was supposed to be resting. That's what Lucas, his engineer, had told him after the grueling thirty laps that had ended with him on the podium again — P2 this time. But rest never came easily. So instead, he found himself wandering into the R&D wing, where the real magic of speed happened: where science became instinct, and instinct became power.

The hallways were lined with screens and prototypes — sleek engines, hybrid units, fragments of aerodynamic designs taped with scribbled notes.
And then there was him.

Stanley almost didn't recognize him at first.

Dr. Xeno Wingfield stood near one of the wind tunnels, his white coat unbuttoned, sleeves rolled up to the elbow, a tablet in one hand. His hair — silver-white, unnaturally so for someone who barely looked in his thirties — caught the light like frost. His black eyes were unreadable, fixed on the turbine spinning inside the glass chamber.

There was something about the way he moved — deliberate, unhurried, as though every gesture had already been calculated.
Stanley had seen surgeons, strategists, and engineers. But this man worked differently. He worked like someone who saw the entire world as a formula waiting to be solved.

And yet, he looked… familiar.

Xeno turned slightly, noticing him at last. "Mr. Snyder," he said, voice even and crisp. "Congratulations on yesterday's race."

Stanley blinked, studying him. "You remember me?"

"Everyone in this building remembers you," Xeno replied. Then a small pause — his lips quirked, just barely. "Though not everyone has the privilege of seeing you outside a cockpit."

Stanley raised an eyebrow. “Privilege, huh? That’s new.”

Xeno glanced back at his screen. “You prefer engines to people. I can understand that.”

Stanley’s smirk faltered for a second. “You sound like you’ve been reading my mind.”

“Not your mind,” Xeno said. “Your telemetry.”

Stanley chuckled — a short, low sound. “Telemetry, huh? You an analyst?”

“Something like that.” Xeno tapped on the tablet and handed it to him. The screen displayed a graph of speed, throttle, and braking zones from yesterday’s race. “I consult on energy optimization for the ERS unit. I’m helping the team evaluate your efficiency patterns.”

Stanley scrolled through the data, eyes narrowing slightly. “You’re saying I’m inefficient?”

Xeno tilted his head. “I’m saying you waste 3.2% of potential output in corner exits. That’s… rare. Most drivers are too cautious. You, on the other hand, push past the optimal acceleration threshold every time.”

“That’s called instinct.”

“That’s called defiance.”

The air between them shifted.

For a long moment, neither spoke. The faint sound of the turbine spinning filled the silence like a heartbeat.
Stanley handed the tablet back. “And what do you call yourself, Doctor?”

“Wingfield,” Xeno said, almost absently. “Xeno Wingfield.”

The name hit him like déjà vu.

Stanley frowned, leaning against the glass. “We’ve met before.”

Xeno finally looked at him — really looked. “NASA. McLaren collaboration, five years ago. You were younger. Less… guarded.”

“And you,” Stanley said, “had shorter hair.”

That earned the faintest flicker of a smile. “Time changes things.”

“Not everything.”

Their eyes met — a long, quiet exchange that said more than words could. Stanley didn’t like being read, but Xeno had a way of seeing through the façade, peeling away layers he didn’t want touched. It was unsettling. And interesting.

They ended up walking the garage together, Xeno explaining the modifications to the hybrid system with the detached precision of a scientist. But beneath the words, Stanley could sense

something else — a faint current of curiosity.

“You’ve seen dozens of drivers,” Stanley said at one point, watching Xeno trace his fingers over the engine. “Why are you so interested in me?”

“I didn’t say I was.”

“You didn’t have to.”

Xeno stopped, hand resting on the side of the car. “Because you drive like you’re running from something,” he said finally. “But instead of fear, it looks like freedom.”

Stanley’s breath caught, though his face didn’t show it. “You talk like a psychologist.”

“I talk like someone who observes.”

“And what else do you see?”

Xeno’s gaze held his — sharp, unwavering. “A man who doesn’t believe in limits until the car tells him otherwise.”

Stanley wanted to laugh, but he didn’t. He just stared back, a slow, crooked smile pulling at the edge of his lips. “You sound like you admire that.”

“I don’t admire recklessness,” Xeno said. “But I do admire precision disguised as chaos.”

“Guess that makes two of us.”

Hours slipped by faster than either noticed. By the time the engineers returned from their lunch breaks, Stanley and Xeno were still in the workshop, talking about downforce coefficients, fuel mapping, and the art of shaving milliseconds off a lap.

But every so often, the conversation drifted — toward things that weren’t written on data sheets.

“You ever drive?” Stanley asked.

“Only flight simulators,” Xeno replied. “I design for motion, not speed.”

“That’s a shame,” Stanley said, eyes narrowing in amusement. “You’d probably be terrifying behind a wheel.”

“I’d prefer to control from above,” Xeno said, lips curling faintly. “Like an equation. No emotion. Just calculation.”

Stanley’s grin widened. “Yeah, that sounds like you.”

“And you,” Xeno countered smoothly, “sound like turbulence.”

For a second, Stanley forgot how to reply.

When he finally left the R&D wing that afternoon, the sun had dipped below the horizon, painting the McLaren building in gold and orange. The meeting had been unexpected — brief, professional — yet it lingered in his mind like the echo of an engine long after the car had stopped.

He wasn't used to people talking to him without fear or flattery.
He wasn't used to being seen.

And somehow, in that calm voice, in that sharp intelligence behind quiet eyes, Stanley had felt something shift. Not attraction, not yet — just… recognition.

He walked toward his car, helmet swinging from his hand. His phone buzzed again — another message from his father. He ignored it. Instead, he opened his glove compartment and slipped the small winged keychain back onto his keyring.

For the first time in a long while, he felt a reason to stay.

Chapter 3: A Year on the Line

Later that night, his hotel room was a familiar mess — racing gear scattered, TV muted on some late-night F1 analysis show. He sat by the window, a glass of water in hand instead of whiskey this time.
He'd stopped drinking after Singapore last season. It wasn't a resolution. Just… disinterest.

The city lights stretched beneath him — another faceless skyline, another country he wouldn't remember beyond the turns of its track.

He picked up his phone and scrolled aimlessly through the news feed.
Then a headline caught his eye:

"Dr. Xeno Wingfield Resigns from NASA Research Division."
'Wingfield, known for his groundbreaking work on hybrid propulsion systems, has formally stepped down after nearly a decade in aerospace engineering. Sources report he plans to "pursue independent research."'

Stanley blinked. Once. Twice.
Then tossed the phone face down on the table.

So what? People left jobs all the time. Especially geniuses.
It wasn't like it mattered.

He stood, stretching, rolling the stiffness from his shoulders. Tomorrow's practice would be longer, hotter. He needed rest. Needed focus. Needed to stop letting random names in headlines distract him.

Still, when he walked past the table again, his gaze flicked toward the phone.
For a moment, he almost picked it back up. Just to reread. Just to… check where Wingfield went.

But he didn't.

Instead, he opened the balcony door, letting the night air rush in. Somewhere in the distance, engines from the nearby track were still testing — faint echoes of speed that sounded almost like home.

He leaned against the railing, eyes half-lidded, the hum of traffic below blending with his thoughts.
He told himself he didn't care.
He told himself it didn't matter.

And yet — beneath the steady rhythm of denial — there was that quiet irritation.
Not at the resignation. But at the thought of never hearing that calm, analytical voice again.

He hated that it even crossed his mind.

A year later, the noise was the same.
Engines still screamed. Cameras still followed. Stanley Snyder still wore the same unreadable expression under his helmet — calm, cold, untouchable.

He'd switched circuits so many times he'd lost count — Monaco, Suzuka, Singapore, Abu Dhabi — each track a blur of heat, sweat, and noise. McLaren had upgraded their unit, sponsors had multiplied, and his name had become a brand: SNYDER 07.
The world saw him as a constant.
They didn't know how much of that constancy was practiced — or how much of it he needed to survive.

"Stan, telemetry looks clean," Lucas's voice crackled through the comms. "Try holding DRS a second longer down sector two. You're losing half a tenth."

Stanley tilted the wheel slightly, eyes narrowing through the visor. "Half a tenth is nothing."

"Half a tenth is everything," Lucas shot back. "Especially against Red Bull this weekend."

Stanley smirked. "Then we'll take it."

He pushed harder — the car slicing through the sharp turn, tires screaming against asphalt.
For a split second, everything was perfect: the balance, the force, the line.
He lived for that instant — the world quiet except for his breath and the pulse of speed.

When he rolled into the pit lane, the crew applauded. Another flawless practice session.
Another day of near-perfection.

Stanley pulled off his gloves and helmet, running a hand through sweat-dampened blond hair.
He caught his reflection in the pit glass — the same detached stare, the same coolness that the media adored. He'd learned to wear it like armor.

"Good run," Lucas said, checking the data on his screen. "You're smoother this year."

"I'm older," Stanley muttered. "And bored."

Lucas chuckled. "Then win faster."

Stanley cracked a faint grin, tossing his gloves aside. "Working on it."

The next morning, he was back at the track before sunrise.

Practice laps. Debrief. Simulator runs. Endless technical meetings. The routine was mechanical, predictable — the kind of order Stanley craved. No surprises. No distractions.

"Your focus is good today," Lucas said, handing him a data pad. "You're finally listening to me."

Stanley glanced at him, expression unreadable. "You sure you're not just getting better at agreeing with me?"

Lucas laughed. “You’re impossible.”

“Exactly why I win.”

The crew laughed faintly at that, though they all knew it wasn’t arrogance. It was truth — Stanley Snyder didn’t believe in limits, not his, not the car’s. And that’s why people both loved and feared him.

As he prepped for another run, a young intern approached hesitantly, tablet clutched in his hands. “Uh, Mr. Snyder? Dr. Wingfield’s name still appears on the old ERS software credit list. Should we remove it before the new patch?”

Stanley froze.

Then — cool as ever — he said, “If it works, don’t touch it.”

The intern nodded and scurried off. Lucas glanced at him curiously. “You know him?”

Stanley’s helmet visor was already down. “No.”

The engine roared to life, drowning out everything else.

He hit the track again, and the world narrowed to a blur of lines and sound — the kind of clarity that left no space for thought. No room for anything but motion.

But somewhere deep inside, a small corner of his mind wandered. To the lab at McLaren. The soft hum of a wind tunnel. The white-haired man who’d once stood beside him and said: “You drive like you’re running from something.”

He tightened his grip on the wheel.

He wasn’t running.
He was chasing.

Whatever it was, he didn’t know. But every lap felt like it might bring him closer.

And maybe that was why, when he crossed the finish line and saw the time flash on the monitor — faster than ever — he didn’t feel triumph.
Just silence.

That night, Stanley lay awake, the keychain still on the bedside table.
He hadn’t looked at it in months. But he hadn’t thrown it away either.

He rolled onto his back, staring at the ceiling, the faint sound of rain tapping against the windows.
One year, and everything had changed — except him. Except the feeling that something important had slipped away before he could even name it.

He shut his eyes, forcing himself to sleep. Tomorrow would be the same — engines, noise, podiums.

And maybe that was enough.

For now.

Chapter 4: The King of Speed

Chapter Notes

> Im updating 2 chapters today because im sick i think i got the influenza plus my upper back hurts like hell. Compensation for i will not update tomorrow. Imagine stanley saying speed like lightning mcqueen.

The world was nothing but sound.

Engines. Wind. His own pulse pounding beneath layers of carbon fiber and adrenaline.
Everything outside that — the grandstands, the cameras, the names — dissolved into static.

Lap 38 of 52.
Stanley Snyder led by 6.4 seconds.

He didn't look at the gap — didn't need to. He could feel it.
That invisible thread between him and the car behind, stretched thin and trembling, but still firmly in his grasp.
He was McLaren's ghost on the track — fast, ruthless, and beautifully precise.

"Copy that, Stan," Lucas's voice buzzed in his ear. "P1, clean air. Bottas behind at plus 6.2. Tire temps steady. You're flying out there."

Stanley's lips curved faintly. "I told you I would."

"Don't jinx it," Lucas warned. "Keep it smooth through Sector 2. The curbs are—"

"I know," Stanley cut him off, voice cool and steady. "I've done this track more times than you've blinked."

"Yeah, yeah. Remind me again why I talk to you?"

"Because I make you look good."

A chuckle through the radio. Then silence.

Stanley leaned into the corner — Turn 9, the kind that separated drivers from champions. He braked late, almost too late, the tires screaming in protest, and exited with barely a twitch. The kind of control that made even seasoned racers hold their breath.

Crowds cheered — a roaring wave that he couldn't hear but somehow felt.
This was his element.
This was home.

He was aware of everything.
The faint vibration of the steering column. The oscillation of the tires as they flirted with the edge of grip. The fuel load lightening lap by lap.
It was like the car spoke to him — every hum, every pulse.
And he answered without words.

Sector 1: clean.
Sector 2: aggressive.
Sector 3: flawless.

Each lap he set, the gap widened. 6.8 seconds. 7.1. 7.5.

The commentators were losing their minds, but Stanley didn't hear them.
He wasn't racing them.
He was racing himself.

Lap 40.

Lucas came back online. "You're three-quarters through. Tires at 52%. We can pit next lap or hold till 47."

Stanley took a breath, eyes flicking over the dashboard readouts. Everything screamed for perfection.
"I'll stretch it," he said. "Two more laps."

"Risky."

"I'm not here to play safe."

That was Stanley Snyder — the driver who never settled, who turned risk into rhythm.
Every race engineer he'd worked with said the same thing: He doesn't drive the car. He commands it.

Lap 41. He hit the DRS zone, slingshotting down the straight. The car roared like a beast unleashed.
7.9 seconds lead.

He barely blinked.

"Beautiful," Lucas said softly over the line. "That's championship pace."

Stanley's voice was low, calm, focused. "It's not over till the line."

"Ha! You sound like your father for once."

"Don't ruin the moment."

By Lap 43, the sky darkened — clouds rolling in fast, thunder rumbling somewhere in the distance. The pit lane came alive with frantic signals.

“Rain incoming,” Lucas said, voice tightening. “Maybe five minutes.”

Stanley didn’t even flinch. “Then I’ll finish this before it arrives.”

“Stan, don’t—”

“Relax,” he said, shifting gears. “I know what I’m doing.”

And he did.

The first few drops hit his visor as he crossed the straight again, but he barely noticed. His hands moved like instinct — braking, downshifting, adjusting. Every motion clean. Controlled.
The car slid once, but he corrected it in a heartbeat, dancing on the line between perfection and chaos.

He was alive here.

Every cell in his body was tuned to one purpose — stay ahead. Stay untouchable.
Because if he stopped, if he slowed down — then he’d have to think.
And thinking meant remembering.

Lap 44.
He’d been leading for three-quarters of the race now. Still untouchable. Still the best.
Even as the track grew slick, he held his line like a ghost carving through rain.

The commentators’ voices echoed distantly through the paddock screens:

> “Snyder dominates again! Unbelievable consistency from McLaren’s star driver—”

“He’s driving like he owns the rain!”

They were right.
He did.

Inside the cockpit, Stanley’s breathing was steady, his focus razor-sharp. Rain droplets scattered across the visor like stars against black glass. The world outside blurred, but the track ahead was crystal clear.

This was what he was made for.
The speed, the silence, the solitude.

Then, a flicker on his dashboard.
Fuel warning — light load.

He didn’t panic. He never did. He adjusted throttle, skimmed the curves tighter, kept the lead stable.
Every calculation made in milliseconds. Every move clean as art.

“Stan, box next lap,” Lucas said. “We’ll go intermediates just in case—”

Stanley didn't answer.

"Stan?"

Still silence.

Lucas exhaled sharply through the comms. "Of course you're ignoring me. Classic."

Stanley smiled faintly beneath the helmet.
He wasn't ignoring. He was listening — to the rain, to the tires, to that heartbeat rhythm of control.

This was his kingdom — asphalt and adrenaline.

Lap 45. The rain thickened, but he stayed ahead.
7.9 seconds.
Still the best.

The car behind tried closing in — faint blip on the radar — but it didn't matter.
No one could touch him when he was like this.
No one ever did.

He shifted gears, felt the car obey like it was part of him. The lights blurred through the mist, the world narrowing to nothing but the line in front of him.

Still the best, he thought.

And somewhere deep in the back of his mind — the place where thoughts dared to sneak through the noise — a quiet, uninvited memory surfaced.

A voice.

"You drive like you're running from something."

He blinked once. Tightened his grip.
And accelerated.

By the time Lap 46 flashed on the board, the rain had turned to mist, the crowd a hazy roar.
Stanley Snyder was still leading — smooth, relentless, unstoppable.

For three-quarters of the race, he had been perfect.

And as he crossed another sector line, water spraying in glittering arcs behind him, the world could see it too —
the man who conquered speed,
the racer who couldn't be touched,
the Snyder who had chosen the track over the throne.

And right now, as thunder cracked across the horizon,
he wouldn't have it any other way.

Chapter 5: The crash of emotions

Chapter Notes

Im gonna say this is a slow build thats why you dont see xeno yet

The world blurred into streaks of color. The track curved like molten steel beneath the blazing sun, and Stanley Snyder's McLaren roared across it — a wild orange streak defying gravity itself. Every vibration of the wheel hummed through his veins. Every shift of gear was poetry in motion.

He was built for this.
This was his church.
This was his pulse.

"Sector one, clean," the engineer's voice crackled in his earpiece, steady and clipped. "You're still ahead by 2.4 seconds."

Stanley grinned under his helmet. "Copy that."

He pressed the throttle harder, feeling the car respond like it was alive — an extension of his will. The crowd roared, but their sound was distant, like thunder beyond a mountain range. To Stanley, the only voice that mattered was the engine — the raw, mechanical heartbeat that drowned everything else.

Each corner demanded precision, grace, and nerve. He gave all three. The McLaren glided over the apex, tires kissing the asphalt, the aerodynamics slicing through wind. He felt untouchable.

"Pit in this lap," the engineer said. "We'll do a fast tire change, clean set, and you're good till the end."

"Copy."

He entered the pit with surgical precision. The team swarmed around the car — orange suits, controlled chaos, a flash of metallic sound. In less than three seconds, he was back out. The crowd erupted as the McLaren screamed back onto the straight, clean and fast.

For three-fourths of the race, Stanley owned the track.
Every lap. Every corner.
His name blazed across the leaderboards.

And yet, behind the visor, his face remained still — unreadable. No smile, no thrill. Just focus.

It wasn't about the glory anymore. It was about control.
It always was.

He thought fleetingly about his father's voice the night before the race.

"You're wasting your potential, Stanley. You could be sitting in a boardroom, not a deathtrap."

"It's my life," he'd said coldly.

"And it'll end faster than you think."

The memory passed as fast as the straight he burned through.

"Stanley," the engineer's voice snapped through again, "left rear tire's showing odd readings. Pressure's dropping slightly."

He frowned. "Numbers?"

"Still within range, but just keep it clean."

Stanley didn't slow down. He couldn't. Not when the finish line was drawing near. He adjusted his grip, eyes narrowing.

A minor imbalance, maybe. Happens all the time.
It's fine.

But the vibration came back — subtle, then sharper.

"Stan, slow down. We're checking—"

He felt it before he heard it.
A sudden jerk beneath him.
The car jolted left.

Then —
BOOM.

A deafening blast of sound as the rear tire exploded, shredding into fiery fragments. The car spun violently, the world turning into a dizzy carousel of color — the sky, the track, the stands — all flickering in chaos.

He wrestled the wheel, heart slamming in his chest, but the McLaren was gone — its balance destroyed, its fate sealed.

The last thing he saw was the red barrier.
Then came the impact.

A bone-rattling crash.
Metal shrieked. Glass shattered.

And everything went white.

Silence.

The world dimmed into a ringing void. Somewhere distant, a siren screamed. He tried to open his eyes, but his vision was fractured — static and blinding light. His chest burned. His arms wouldn't move.

"Stanley! Stanley, can you hear me?!"

He couldn't tell if it was real or just the echo of a dream. He tried to breathe but choked on air thick with smoke. Then — nothing.

Darkness took him.

He woke up to the smell of antiseptic.

Everything was white. Too white. The light stung his eyes, the air too clean, too still. Machines hummed beside him, steady and cold.

It took him a moment to realize he was in a hospital room. His right arm was bandaged, a cast wrapping part of his ribs. IV lines ran into his hand. The faint sound of heart monitors filled the silence.

His throat was dry as sand when he croaked, "...Where…"

"Mr. Snyder?" A nurse appeared from the doorway, relief softening her expression. "You're awake. Thank God."

Stanley blinked at her. "How long?"

"Two days," she said gently. "You've been in and out. A few fractures, minor concussion, but no internal damage. You're lucky."

He wasn't listening. His eyes drifted toward the television hanging from the corner of the room. The volume was low, but he could see his own image plastered across the screen — the burning McLaren, the red flags, the headlines flashing in bold:

"STANLEY SNYDER'S TERRIFYING CRASH – MIRACLE SURVIVAL."

His jaw tightened. He could see it in his mind again — the tire bursting, the car spinning, the crash. The sheer violence of it.

The nurse followed his gaze and hesitated. "Do you want me to turn that off?"

"No." His voice came out flat. "Leave it."

Reporters on screen speculated, some calling it a miracle, others criticizing his recklessness. His father's company issued a statement: "The Snyder family is thankful for Stanley's safety and asks for privacy."

But Stanley knew the tone. He could hear it between the lines. It wasn't concern. It was embarrassment.

He could almost hear his father again: "You've proven your point. Now come home."

His hands curled into fists against the sheets.

Outside his window, flashes of cameras flickered — reporters, fans, journalists camped out for a glimpse of the "Miracle Racer." He hated it. Every single second of it.

He turned away, pressing his forehead against the pillow, shutting his eyes. The ache in his chest wasn't just physical. It was deeper — sharp, heavy.

He had risked everything to be free, to escape the golden cage of the Snyder empire. But here he was — broken, helpless, surrounded by people who only cared because he almost died.

"Stanley," the nurse said softly, "you should rest."

He didn't answer.

She left quietly, closing the door.

He lay there in silence, staring at the white ceiling, the rhythm of the heart monitor his only companion.

Chapter 6: The Fall

The flash of cameras was blinding.
Every step Stanley Snyder took out of the hospital felt like walking into a firing squad.

“Stanley, are you done with Formula 1 after the accident?”
“Stanley, sources say McLaren’s reviewing your contract—any truth to that?”
“Do you regret the risks you took?”
“Do you think you’ve disappointed your family?”

Dozens of microphones, recorders, and cell phones were thrust toward him. The air buzzed with overlapping voices, the heat of lights, the shrill click of camera shutters. His sunglasses hid the dark bruises under his eyes, but his jaw was tight, unmoving, his expression carved from stone.

He said nothing.
He didn’t owe them words.

The hospital’s security escorted him to the car waiting at the curb, an official McLaren transport vehicle with tinted windows. As he stepped inside, the sound of shouting faded — replaced by the muted hum of the engine and the rhythmic pulse of his heartbeat.

For a moment, the silence felt heavy.

Across from him sat his team manager, visibly tense, his tie askew. “Stan,” he began carefully, “you should probably stay off the press for a while. McLaren’s handling PR, but—”

Stanley leaned his head back, eyes closed. “They’re calling it my fault, aren’t they?”

The man hesitated. “They’re… saying it was a combination of driver pressure and tire wear. But you know how it goes. Once they smell blood—”

Stanley let out a low breath, more amused than anything. “Yeah. They don’t stop biting.”

He turned his head toward the window. Outside, a billboard still showed his face — Stanley Snyder: The Iron Racer. The same one that once inspired kids, fans, headlines. Now it just felt like mockery.

When he arrived at his family’s mansion that evening, the lights were all on. That was never a good sign.

The grand doors opened before he even reached them. His mother stood in the foyer, perfect in posture, a woman sculpted from elegance and restraint. Behind her, his father — tall, broad-shouldered, and radiating authority even in silence.

“Stanley,” his mother said softly, “you should’ve called before coming.”

He glanced around the room, still in his racing jacket. “Didn’t realize I needed an appointment to see my own parents.”

His father’s tone cut through like ice. “You made an appointment with death instead.”

Stanley’s smirk faltered.

His father crossed the room, stopping just a few feet away. “Do you understand what you’ve done? You nearly died, Stanley. For what? Fame? Ego? You think that’s worth more than your family’s name?”

“It’s not about the family name,” Stanley said flatly. “It’s about my life.”

“Your life,” his father repeated bitterly. “You mean the one you keep gambling for entertainment? You had a future in your hands — you could’ve taken over the company, expanded our legacy. But instead, you threw it away for—”

“For myself,” Stanley interrupted, voice rising.

The silence that followed was deafening.

His mother flinched slightly, but his father didn’t. The older man just stared at him — disappointment layered over anger. “You’ve always been selfish. You think being a Snyder means you can do whatever you want without consequence. But now you’ve ruined your reputation, and ours along with it.”

Stanley laughed once — hollow, tired. “Right. Because I’m an embarrassment. Not because your son almost died.”

“You chose this,” his father said coldly. “You chose wrong.”

His mother stepped forward gently, voice soft but trembling. “Stanley… maybe it’s time to stop. You’ve proven yourself. You don’t have to keep doing this.”

He looked at her for a long moment, then turned away. “You don’t get it.”

And he walked past them — through the grand marble hallways lined with portraits of businessmen and tycoons — all of them Snyders. Men who built, acquired, controlled. None of them ever drove a car faster than fifty miles an hour.

Upstairs, in his old room, he finally let himself breathe.

The place hadn’t changed — the trophies lined on the shelf, the framed headlines, the photos of podium finishes. But now, as he sat on the edge of his bed, the silence pressed down like gravity.

He turned on the TV absentmindedly.
Another news channel.
Another headline.

“Snyder Reckless at the Wheel: Has McLaren’s Star Lost His Edge?”
“Corporate Heir or Crash Magnet? The Downfall of F1’s Cold Prince.”

He muted it, jaw clenching. The world that once adored him now tore him apart piece by piece. Sponsors withdrawing, critics swarming, fans divided.

He picked up his phone — dozens of missed calls from McLaren’s PR team, his agent, some teammates. He ignored them all.

Instead, his eyes landed on an old message thread — one that hadn’t been opened in over a year.

Xeno Wingfield.

He stared at the name for a long time.
They had met a few times at a few McLaren tech event, when NASA collaborated for a simulation on reaction control systems. Xeno had been sharp, controlled, everything Stanley wasn’t. They’d argued over design logic for hours — two geniuses, two egos, colliding like meteors.

He’d found that interesting.
Maybe too interesting.

He scrolled through their old conversation:

Xeno: “You drive like you’re proving something to yourself.”
Stanley: “I am.”
Xeno: “Then I hope you win. Or at least survive.”

He shut off the phone and leaned back, staring at the ceiling.

The press could tear him down, his family could disown him, and the world could move on — but deep down, the silence hurt more than the crash. The emptiness that followed once the engines stopped.

He didn’t regret racing.
But for the first time, he didn’t know if he could face what came next.

He stood, moving toward the window. Outside, the city lights glittered like stars trapped under glass. His reflection stared back — bruised, tired, human.

For a man who’d lived his life in motion, stillness felt unbearable.

His phone buzzed again. Another headline alert.
He almost ignored it, until one name caught his eye.

NASA’s Dr. Xeno Wingfield resigns from post.

Stanley stared at it for a long, unblinking moment — the name, the memory, the irony.

Then he laughed under his breath, bitterly. “Figures. We all fall eventually.”

The city lights flickered in his eyes as he whispered to the empty room:

“It's been a year since you resigned, huh, genius? I crashed. Guess we’re both disappointments now.”

He turned away, the weight of the world pressing against his shoulders. But deep in that silence — buried beneath pride, exhaustion, and pain — something inside him refused to yield.

He wasn’t done.
Not yet.

Chapter 7

For weeks, the house had been quiet. Too quiet.

The Snyder mansion, once alive with calls, assistants, meetings, and the background hum of success, now existed in a kind of suspended silence. Even the air felt heavy — like the world itself was holding its breath, waiting for Stanley Snyder to decide whether he'd ever get behind a wheel again.

He hadn't left his room much. The bruises had faded, but the stiffness in his ribs hadn't. The doctors said rest. His team said rehabilitation. His father said nothing at all.

He spent most of his time by the window, a cup of untouched coffee cooling on the nightstand beside him, eyes half-lidded as he watched the world move on without him.

The race calendar continued — Bahrain, Imola, Monaco. Other drivers filled the headlines. Other victories were celebrated. McLaren's press releases mentioned "regrouping" and "focusing on recovery."

In the silence, Stanley's mind refused to stop.
Each time he blinked, he saw the flash of the explosion, the curve of the track, the blur of smoke and light.
And the weightless moment before impact — when he thought, So this is how it ends.

A knock came at his door.

He ignored it.

"Stan," came a familiar voice, light and easy despite the gravity that always hung around the Snyder estate. "You planning on hiding forever, or can your favorite manager/support come in?"

Stanley sighed. "Door's open, Lucas."

The door creaked open, and Lucas Reed stepped in — McLaren's PR and team liaison, and one of the few people who could speak to Stanley without being immediately ignored. His dark hair was a mess, his tie hung loose, and his usual calm was replaced by something halfway between relief and worry.

He dropped a folder on the desk and crossed his arms. "You look like hell, boss."

Stanley smirked faintly. "Good to see you too."

Lucas studied him for a moment before sitting on the couch. "You know, I've been dodging every reporter asking if you're retiring. It's like a daily cardio routine at this point."

"Tell them to keep guessing," Stanley muttered.

“That’s what I’ve been doing. But McLaren’s starting to run out of patience.” Lucas opened the folder — official letters, schedules, signatures, and PR drafts. “They’re not cutting you off, but they are cutting back. For now.”

Stanley’s eyes flicked to the papers. “Meaning?”

“Meaning,” Lucas said carefully, “they still want you. But they need time to rebuild their image after the crash. Six to eight months off the grid — rehab, no public appearances, no interviews. Just you disappearing for a while.”

Stanley leaned back, brow furrowing. “They’re putting me on the shelf.”

“They’re saving your seat,” Lucas countered. “And I had to bargain like hell to make sure of that.”

Stanley’s gaze sharpened. “Bargain?”

Lucas exhaled, rubbing the back of his neck. “You were one bad press cycle away from being replaced, Stan. Sponsors were pulling out, your family wasn’t helping the optics, and your silence isn’t exactly reassuring the public that you’re okay.”

“I don’t care what they think,” Stanley muttered.

“Well, I do,” Lucas said firmly. “Because whether you like it or not, people still care. The team still cares. I care.”

Stanley looked away, jaw tightening. He hated the sympathy in that tone — hated how it chipped at the walls he’d built.

“So what,” he said coldly. “You want me to smile for the cameras and say I’ve learned my lesson?”

Lucas shook his head. “No. I want you to take a break. For real this time. Rest. Heal. Maybe… start over.”

Stanley frowned. “Start over?”

“Yeah.” Lucas gave a small smile. “Not as the heir. Not as the untouchable driver. Just as Stanley Snyder, human being — the guy who survived a crash that could’ve ended everything.”

Stanley gave a humorless laugh. “You make it sound poetic.”

“I make it sound possible,” Lucas said quietly. “Because right now, you’re running on fumes. And if you don’t stop, there won’t be anything left of you to rebuild.”

The words lingered.
For once, Stanley didn’t have a sharp comeback.

He stared down at his bandaged wrist, the faint ache still reminding him of that day. His reflection in the window — pale, scarred, exhausted — looked almost like a stranger.

Lucas's tone softened. "McLaren's giving you six to eight months. They'll handle PR, testing, and all that noise. You just… breathe. And when you're ready, you come back."

Stanley looked up, expression unreadable. "And if I don't?"

"Then at least you tried resting," Lucas said with a shrug. "Worst case, you'll figure out who you are without the helmet."

Silence filled the room again. The sunlight through the window caught the faint silver line of a scar on Stanley's temple — a reminder of how close it all came.

He exhaled slowly, the tension in his shoulders easing just slightly. "Six months, huh?"

"Maybe eight," Lucas said, smiling faintly. "Depending on how long it takes for the media to find a new scandal."

Stanley huffed a laugh. "Lucky me."

Lucas stood, brushing off his coat. "I booked you a private place near the coast. No press, no reporters, just quiet. It's not permanent — just a clean slate."

Stanley tilted his head. "You planned this far ahead?"

"Yeah," Lucas said simply. "Because I know you, Stan. You won't stop unless someone makes you. And I figured if the world won't, I will."

He moved to the door, pausing before he left. "You're still McLaren's best driver. Don't forget that. They're not done with you — they're just waiting for the man who made the car fly."

When Lucas left, the quiet returned. But it didn't feel as suffocating this time.

Stanley sat there for a long time, the sound of the city faint through the glass.
For the first time since the crash, he felt something small but real — not pride, not defiance. Just… stillness.

Maybe Lucas was right. Maybe rest wasn't weakness. Maybe it was survival.

He reached for his phone and scrolled again.
That same article headline stared back at him:

"NASA's Dr. Xeno Wingfield Resigns."

His thumb hovered over the search bar, almost typing before he caught himself.

"Tch," he muttered, setting the phone face-down. "I really must be bored."

But even as he leaned back and closed his eyes, the thought wouldn’t leave.
Somewhere out there, another man had walked away from everything.
And for the first time in a long time — Stanley wondered why.

Chapter 8: The Quiet Coast

Stanley expected a downgrade.
After everything — the accident, the criticism, the headlines calling him "reckless" and "washed-up" — he thought Lucas would dump him somewhere obscure, maybe a cabin on a forgotten island or a shabby villa near the edge of the coast. Somewhere silent enough for him to rot until his body recovered and the world forgot.

Instead, the driver dropped him off at the gates of Rivermount Cove, one of the most exclusive coastal villages in the country.

The air was different here — clean, crisp, scented faintly with salt and jasmine. The streets were carved with polished cobblestones, each turn framed by ivory walls and flowering vines. The sound of the sea hummed like a distant hymn.

Stanley stepped out of the car, blinking against the sunlight.
"This can't be it," he muttered, pushing his sunglasses higher. "Lucas wouldn't waste that much budget."

But the driver handed him a set of keys, a folder, and smiled. "Welcome home, Mr. Snyder."

The townhouse before him was nothing short of beautiful — clean lines, pale sandstone walls, tall glass windows that reflected the ocean's silver hue. It looked like something out of a luxury magazine, not a convalescent hideout for a disgraced racer.

Stanley sighed, running a hand through his short blond hair. "Either Lucas owes someone a huge favor… or I'm being fattened up for public redemption."

Inside, the house smelled faintly of cedar and new paint. It had a living room with an ocean view, a compact kitchen stocked with the basics, and a master bedroom upstairs that opened to a private balcony. Everything was… peaceful. Too peaceful.

He dropped his bag on the couch and sat down, the silence almost mocking.
For years, he lived off adrenaline — the roar of engines, the pulse of victory, the flash of cameras. Now, the only sound was the soft tick of a clock and the distant rhythm of waves.

He opened his phone.
Messages. Dozens of them.
A few from his Mother.

He didn't bother replying.

After a while, he wandered outside to explore. The neighborhood was lined with sleek cars — Aston Martins, Teslas, even an old Ferrari parked like decoration. The lawns were flawless, the hedges trimmed with geometric precision.

A woman was tending her garden next door. She was small, sunhat dipping low over her face, hands covered in soil as she arranged white lilies in the soil. When she noticed him, Stanley expected a flicker of recognition — that faint widening of eyes people always gave when they realized who he was.

But she only nodded politely and returned to her flowers.

He blinked. “Huh.”

Farther down, a man in a polo shirt climbed into a luxury sedan, waved at his wife, and drove off. The rhythm repeated with other neighbors — wives watering plants, husbands leaving for the day, no one paying him more than a passing glance.

It was like walking through a painting — perfect, silent, detached.

For the first time in a long while, Stanley felt invisible.

And strangely, he didn’t know if he liked it or hated it.

He stopped near the fence, glancing again at the woman’s garden. She was humming softly, brushing a stray lock of hair behind her ear as she wiped the sweat from her neck. She looked content. Ordinary.

Stanley hadn’t seen “ordinary” in years.

He returned inside, dropped into the couch, and stared at the ceiling.
“Lucas, what kind of joke is this…” he muttered.

Then he laughed — dry, tired. Maybe this was the punishment.
Not isolation. Not the loss of fame.
But being dropped into a world that didn’t care who Stanley Snyder was.

A world where no one clapped.
No one criticized.
No one looked at him twice.

He stood, poured himself a glass of water, and stepped out onto the balcony overlooking the sea. The sun was beginning to dip, scattering gold across the horizon.

It was quiet — painfully quiet.

And in that silence, something inside him began to slow down.
The restlessness, the noise, the weight of being seen — all of it dulled.

Maybe Lucas was right. Maybe he did need this.
Even if he didn’t want it.

Chapter 9: A Strange Kind of Peace

Two weeks passed — and for the first time in years, Stanley Snyder forgot what noise felt like.

The mornings here were soft. He'd wake up to the sound of waves against the cliffs, the faint chatter of birds, and the laughter of neighbors drifting through open windows. It was nothing like the chaos of race tracks or the sterile buzz of press conferences. Here, no one shouted his name or cared about his lap times.

And somehow, he'd slipped into their rhythm.

Every day, he'd take slow walks by the coast road, hands shoved in his pockets, letting the sea breeze tangle his blond hair. He'd stop by the local café — a tiny, family-run place with mismatched chairs — and sometimes, when the barista couldn't get the espresso machine to cooperate, he'd fix it himself with a smirk. "I've worked with worse engines," he'd say.

By afternoon, he'd find himself chatting with the neighbors.

The women who tended their gardens soon realized the quiet foreigner next door wasn't as standoffish as he looked. They'd wave him over, offer iced tea or lemon cake, and before long, he was helping carry fertilizer bags and teasing them like an old friend.

"Mrs. Delaney, you're overwatering those orchids again," Stanley said one morning, crouching beside her planter.

She gasped, hand on her hip. "And what would a race car driver know about orchids, huh?"

He grinned. "Enough to know you're drowning them."

They laughed, and soon the others joined — a group of wives with garden gloves, gossiping and chuckling while their husbands mowed lawns or polished cars nearby.

Even the men warmed up to him. He'd sit on their porch steps with a beer, talking about engine performance and how to cut fuel costs. One of them mentioned his struggling shipping business, and Stanley, almost without realizing, began explaining market leverage, supplier relationships, and how to time contracts for profit spikes.

The man blinked at him. "You sure you're not a businessman?"

Stanley laughed. "My father would kill to hear you say that."

In the evenings, children would wander up his driveway — curious about the "cool guy with the shiny car." Stanley had a stash of toys and candies sent by fans months ago, still unopened. He handed them out easily, enjoying the way the kids' faces lit up.

"Here," he'd say, tossing a pack of chocolate coins. "You win a race, you get a prize."

“Did you really drive cars that fast?” one of them asked once, eyes wide.

Stanley smiled faintly. “Faster than you can imagine.”

Peace. That’s what it was. It wasn’t fame or glory. It wasn’t speed. But it was… something he hadn’t known he wanted.

Until the day that kid showed up.

It was a lazy afternoon — clouds moving slow, the ocean shimmering. Stanley sat on the front porch, reading a magazine, when he felt a tug on his sleeve.

“Hey, mister.”

He looked down. A small boy stood there — maybe seven or eight — with a shock of strange, spiky hair, pale green like leeks, and eyes that seemed too sharp for his age. He wore an oversized shirt and carried a battered science kit box.

Stanley blinked. “...You lost, kid?”

The boy shook his head. “No. I heard you give candies to everyone.”

“Ah. A negotiator.” Stanley smirked, rummaging in the tin beside him. “Alright, what do you want? Chocolate, gummies, lollipop?”

“Lollipop,” the boy said immediately, then added, “The sour kind.”

Stanley handed one over, amused. “You’ve got taste.”

The boy unwrapped it carefully, then looked up at him. “You’re Stanley Snyder.”

The grin froze slightly on Stanley’s face. “...Yeah. Guess you know me?”

The kid shrugged. “I watch racing clips with my dad. You were good. Too reckless, though.”

Stanley stared, then laughed under his breath. “You’re not supposed to insult the guy giving you candy, kid.”

“I’m not insulting. I’m observing.” The boy licked the lollipop, eyes narrowing thoughtfully. “People who go too fast crash easier. That’s basic physics.”

Stanley tilted his head, curiosity piqued. “You talk like a forty-year-old engineer.”

The boy shrugged again, completely unbothered. “I like science. My name’s Senku.”

“Senku, huh?” Stanley leaned back, watching him. “You from around here?”

“Yeah. Moved here with my dad last year. He works at home. Always busy.”

“Let me guess — scientist?”

The boy's lips twitched. "Something like that."

Stanley chuckled. "You're an interesting one, Senku."

"I get that a lot."

The kid finished his candy, dusted his hands, and walked off toward the next house — the one with the neat white fence and rows of hydrangeas. Stanley watched him go, brow furrowed slightly.

Something about that house… felt familiar. The way the curtains were drawn, the faint hum of classical music behind the glass, the precision of everything.

He couldn't place it.

But the name echoed in his head long after the kid disappeared inside.

Senku.

He'd heard it before. Somewhere.

And when he finally went inside that evening, sitting by the window as the sun dipped below the horizon, he saw a tall figure through the glass next door — white-haired, poised, moving with quiet precision as he set a mug of coffee down beside a tablet.

Stanley froze.

Because that man looked very familiar.

And though he couldn't see his face clearly through the reflection —
he already knew.

Xeno Wingfield.

The world really was too damn small.

Chapter 10: The Kid with Opinions

It had been three days since the green-haired kid first showed up.

Stanley thought that was the end of it — a random encounter with a strange but sharp little boy. But on a lazy Thursday morning, while he was sprawled on his porch with a cup of black coffee and the newspaper, the sound of quick footsteps came up the gravel path again.

He didn't even look up. "You again, leek-head?"

Senku snorted, hands on his hips. "It's Senku, not leek-head. And yes, I came for more toys."

Stanley finally glanced down. The boy was back, hair still spiking in all directions like static, wearing a faded NASA T-shirt that looked two sizes too big. He had that same annoyingly confident expression — the one of a kid who already knew he was going to get what he wanted.

"Oh, so now I'm a free toy shop?" Stanley drawled, pretending to look unimpressed.

"You said you had plenty."

"I did. Doesn't mean you can just—"

Before he could finish, Senku crossed his arms and cut him off with a completely serious face. "Besides, I deserve them. I had to watch the new F1 match with my dad yesterday, and it was awful."

That caught Stanley's attention. He lowered the newspaper, one eyebrow raising. "Awful, huh?"

Senku nodded, disgust written all over his small face. "The new racers suck."

Stanley's lips twitched, holding back a laugh. "You're too young to sound like a retired critic."

"No, I mean it!" Senku stomped his foot. "They drive like they're scared. No risk, no edge, no… what's the word—ah, innovation! They just stick to boring tactics and still spin out like amateurs."

Stanley let out a slow chuckle, shaking his head. "You're a harsh little scientist."

"It's the truth," Senku said matter-of-factly. "When you raced, it looked alive. Fast. Dangerous. People were actually watching to feel something."

For a second, the words hit deeper than they should've. Stanley looked away, taking a sip of coffee to hide the faint smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

"Yeah, well, look where that got me," he muttered.

Senku blinked. “You mean the crash?”

“Yup. The big, fiery kind of ‘oops.’”

The boy tilted his head. “You didn’t crash because you were bad. You crashed because something went wrong with the tires. It wasn’t your fault.”

Stanley froze, mid-sip.

Most adults didn’t even say that anymore. They said he was reckless, arrogant, overconfident — but this kid, this tiny scientist with a sweet tooth and an ego to match, said it like it was obvious.

He set down the cup, smirking softly. “You do your homework, huh?”

Senku grinned. “Always.”

Stanley sighed and opened the drawer by the porch table, rummaging through it before pulling out a small remote-controlled car — bright red, still in its packaging. “Alright, genius. You earned it.”

Senku’s eyes widened. “Seriously?”

“Yup. But don’t crash it. Trust me — it hurts the pride.”

The boy laughed, grabbing the toy like it was gold. “Thanks! You’re actually cooler in person.”

“I get that a lot.”

Senku was about to run off when he stopped, turning back with that same mischievous glint. “You know, my dad said he saw you once. He doesn’t like racing, though. Says it’s a waste of brain cells.”

Stanley snorted. “Sounds like a fun guy.”

Senku shrugged. “He’s a scientist. He thinks everything that doesn’t involve numbers is dumb.”

“Then I already don’t like him,” Stanley said, leaning back on the porch railing.

Senku grinned, waving the box. “You’d like him if you talked to him. He’s kind of… like you, but older and crankier.”

Stanley raised a brow. “Oh, I highly doubt that.”

But when the kid jogged off toward the same white-fenced house, Stanley couldn’t help staring again. The house that felt too organized, too perfect.

And sure enough — a moment later, the door opened. A tall man in a white shirt stepped out to meet the boy. Silver-white hair glinted in the sunlight, posture straight, expression calm as he took the toy from Senku's hands to inspect it.

Even from a distance, Stanley knew that face.

The sharp eyes, the air of intellect, the faintly arrogant composure that could only belong to Dr. Xeno Wingfield.

Stanley muttered to himself, "Well, I'll be damned."

Xeno looked up briefly — just a second — and their eyes met across the small fence separating their yards.

Stanley raised his coffee cup in a lazy salute, a smirk tugging at his lips.

Xeno's gaze flickered — recognition, irritation, something unreadable — before he turned away, hand on Senku's shoulder, leading the boy back inside without a word.

The door shut softly.

Stanley leaned back, still smirking. "Guess the world really does have a sense of humor."

The sound of the ocean filled the silence again, and for the first time since the accident, Stanley felt the spark of something familiar — not the roar of engines, not the burn of adrenaline — but curiosity.

And maybe, a bit of trouble brewing on the horizon.

Chapter 11: Two Disappointments and a Bottle of Wine

Stanley wasn't the type to plan things. He lived on instinct — whether it was overtaking on a risky turn or deciding to show up at his old rival's door with a bottle of wine and zero preparation.

That evening, the coast was painted in soft gold, the air smelling faintly of salt and garden flowers. The sun dipped low over the horizon as Stanley stood outside the white-fenced townhouse next door, a bottle of expensive red in one hand and his trademark smirk already in place.

He'd told himself it was casual. Just a friendly chat between two washed-up men who disappointed everyone important in their lives.

Totally harmless.

He rang the doorbell. Once. Twice.

No answer.

He was about to turn back when he heard the lock click.

The door swung open, revealing Dr. Xeno Wingfield — tall, immaculate, and frustratingly calm. He wore a sleek black long-sleeved polo, sleeves buttoned neatly at the wrist, not a strand of his silver-white hair out of place. His expression was unreadable — composed, sharp, and just a touch unimpressed.

For a heartbeat, neither spoke.

Then Stanley grinned. "Well, damn. You clean up nice for someone hiding by the ocean."

Xeno's gaze flicked from the bottle in Stanley's hand to his face. "Stanley Snyder," he said slowly, voice low and cool. "Of course it would be you."

"Miss me?" Stanley teased, leaning against the doorframe.

"Not particularly."

"Aw, that hurts."

Xeno sighed softly, as if he'd already used up all his patience. "You're far from the kind of company I expected here. What brings you to this coast, of all places?"

Stanley held up the bottle. "A peace offering. Or maybe a confession."

"A confession?"

"Two disappointments in one neighborhood? Thought it deserved a toast."

That earned a faint twitch at the corner of Xeno's mouth — not quite a smile, but not a frown either. "You always had a dramatic way of putting things."

"Comes with the job description."

For a moment, Xeno looked at him silently, then exhaled. "You're impossible to ignore, even after years."

"Then you should let me in before I cause a scene."

After a pause that lasted just long enough to make it awkward, Xeno stepped aside. "Fine. But only because Senku is asleep."

"Didn't know you had a kid," Stanley said, walking in.

Xeno shut the door behind them. "He's not mine by blood. Long story."

"Guess we both have a few of those."

The house looked exactly how Stanley imagined it: spotless, organized, quiet. Bookshelves lined the walls — not just any books, but heavy, scientific ones filled with equations and the kind of brilliance Stanley could never fake understanding. A sleek lamp cast warm light over the glass table where Xeno now placed two crystal wine glasses.

Stanley leaned back in the chair, stretching casually. "Nice place. You hiding out or just retired early?"

"Resigned," Xeno replied smoothly, pouring the wine with practiced precision. "And you? Nursing broken bones or broken pride?"

Stanley chuckled. "Little bit of both."

They clinked glasses, the sound sharp and soft all at once.

"So," Stanley said, swirling the wine. "The great Dr. Xeno Wingfield, former NASA top dog, now living in a beach village. What's the story there?"

Xeno's lips curved faintly. "You make it sound like I've fallen from grace."

"Didn't you?"

"Perhaps," Xeno admitted, his tone almost amused. "Let's just say I realized I valued peace over bureaucracy. And you? Still racing toward death?"

"Temporarily benched," Stanley said dryly. "Team wants me to rest. Press wants me gone. Parents want me in a suit."

"Ah. The trifecta of disapproval."

Stanley smirked. "Two disappointments, like I said."

Xeno met his gaze over the rim of his glass. “You were always more self-aware than you pretended.”

“And you were always more of a perfectionist than you needed to be.”

For a moment, silence stretched between them — comfortable, tense, familiar.

Then Stanley leaned forward, elbows on the table. “You know, you’re the last person I expected to see here.”

“The feeling is mutual,” Xeno replied, voice softer now. “But perhaps fate enjoys irony.”

“Or punishment.”

“Possibly both.”

They shared a quiet laugh, something small but real.

Stanley studied him — the same calm poise, the quiet authority, the kind of brilliance that once intimidated him but now only intrigued. He couldn’t help but say, “You look good, Xeno. Peace suits you.”

Xeno tilted his head. “And you look… surprisingly grounded.”

“Don’t jinx it.”

He raised his glass again. “To disappointing everyone but ourselves.”

Xeno actually smiled this time — faint, but genuine. “To that, at least, we’ve succeeded.”

They drank in silence after that, the kind of silence that didn’t need filling. Outside, the ocean whispered against the cliffs, and the stars began to appear over the calm horizon.

For a fleeting second, it felt like the world wasn’t watching. No cameras, no boards, no mistakes to fix.

Just two men, tired of being extraordinary, sitting by the sea with nothing left to prove — except maybe that they were still alive.

And maybe, just maybe, that was enough.

Chapter 12: A Habit Called Xeno

Three months.
That was how long it took for Stanley Snyder to become a permanent fixture on Dr. Xeno Wingfield's porch.

Every morning like clockwork, the quiet rhythm of the coast would break with a familiar knock — two light taps, one impatient one — followed by the unmistakable drawl of the retired racer saying,
"Open up, Doc. Don't make me die of boredom out here."

And every time, without fail, the door would open.

Never an enthusiastic welcome, never a rejection either. Just Xeno — neat as always, hair brushed back, sleeves rolled precisely, looking like he'd just stepped out of a magazine on minimalism and discipline. He'd sigh, gesture for Stanley to come in, and return to whatever project he was working on.

At first, Stanley thought it was pity.
By the second week, he realized it was tolerance.
By the third month, he began to suspect it was something else entirely.

Most mornings started the same way — Stanley sprawled across Xeno's couch while the scientist brewed coffee. The living room smelled faintly of roasted beans and ink, the faint hiss of the espresso machine filling the air.

"Do you ever do anything fun?" Stanley asked one morning, flipping through Xeno's research notes like a nosy teenager.

"I find molecular modeling quite enjoyable," Xeno replied without looking up.

"Yeah, thrilling stuff," Stanley deadpanned. "I can feel the excitement radiating from your spreadsheets."

Xeno shot him a side glance. "Some of us stimulate our minds without endangering our lives every weekend."

Stanley smirked, sipping his coffee. "Touché."

They'd argue, tease, and bicker over the smallest things — coffee strength, music preferences, whether speed was a form of intelligence ("It's instinct," Stanley insisted. "It's calculation," Xeno countered).

And yet, they never ran out of things to talk about.

Stanley found himself learning more about Xeno's quiet world — his research, his strange inventions, his self-imposed exile from everything that used to define him. And in turn,

Stanley shared stories about racing: the danger, the thrill, the loneliness of being worshipped by people who didn't really see him.

Sometimes, they'd sit in silence, just watching the ocean from Xeno's balcony.

Stanley would catch himself looking — not at the sea, but at Xeno. At the way his hair caught the light, or how his expression softened when he wasn't trying to sound like the smartest man alive.

It was subtle at first — a quiet warmth, a flicker of curiosity. But soon, it became something he looked forward to.

Xeno had become his anchor.

He didn't know when it started — maybe after that night with the wine, or the day Xeno had wordlessly handed him a towel after he got caught in the rain, or when Senku proudly declared Stanley was his "favorite human test subject."

All Stanley knew was that the days felt emptier when Xeno didn't open the door.

One afternoon, after another lazy day with no news from McLaren, Stanley found himself standing by his window, watching the street below. The women were out again — tending their gardens, chatting with their husbands, living lives that didn't need headlines.

He smiled faintly. Peaceful, sure. But boring.

He'd tried helping out — fixing a neighbor's car engine, giving the kids racing stickers, even sharing business advice again. But none of it filled that restless space in his chest.

Maybe because there was only one person here who didn't treat him like a celebrity, or a failure, or a charity case.

Just Stanley.

And that person was next door.

He grabbed his jacket, ran a hand through his blond hair, and made his way to the familiar white fence.

The sun was low, casting long shadows across the stone path. He didn't even bother knocking this time — just leaned against the doorframe and called out, "Doc, I'm here for my daily dose of intellectual abuse."

The door opened.

Xeno looked at him with that same mild expression, though a trace of amusement flickered in his eyes. "You're unusually persistent."

"Yeah, well, the women here are all married," Stanley said, smirking. "You're the only one who listens when I talk."

“An unfortunate honor,” Xeno murmured, stepping aside to let him in.

Stanley grinned and followed. “Don’t pretend you don’t like the company.”

“I don’t dislike it,” Xeno admitted as he poured two glasses of cold tea.

Stanley leaned against the counter, watching him. “That’s the nicest thing anyone’s said to me all month.”

They sat by the open window again, the sea stretching endlessly beyond the horizon. The waves rolled in slow and calm — the kind of calm Stanley once thought he could never stand.

But now, with Xeno beside him, the silence didn’t feel heavy. It felt… full.

He caught himself smiling, turning slightly to watch the man who once used to be his opposite in every way. Xeno didn’t notice — or maybe he did — but Stanley didn’t care either way.

For once, he wasn’t chasing speed. He wasn’t running from failure.

He was just there — in the quiet, in the company of someone who didn’t need him to be anything more than what he already was.

And though he’d never admit it out loud, Stanley Snyder was beginning to think that maybe, just maybe, he liked the calm after all.

Even if the calm came with silver hair, too many books, and a sharp tongue that refused to flatter him.

Chapter 13: The Quiet Before the Wave

Chapter Notes

> So i think i have never clear out what lucas really is to stanley you know he is like a bestfriend/manager yeah.

Four months.

That's how long Stanley had been living on the coast — long enough for the scent of salt and morning coffee to feel like home, long enough to forget the rhythm of engines and roaring crowds.

Lucas called earlier that afternoon, his voice cutting through the easy silence of the townhouse like a reminder of the life Stanley used to have.

"Just a monthly check-in, Snyder," Lucas said, tone half-professional, half-friendly. "McLaren still has you on contract, remember? I'll swing by next week."

Stanley leaned back on the couch, one hand behind his head. "Sure. Bring decent beer this time, not the imported garbage."

Lucas chuckled. "Noted. Oh, and your parents called the office again. You should pick up for once, man. Four months of radio silence from their only son is driving them nuts."

Stanley sighed, his gaze flicking to the open balcony where the sea glittered faintly gold under the setting sun. "Yeah, yeah, I'll call them. Eventually."

"You said that last month."

"Then it's a tradition," he quipped, but there was a weight in his chest he couldn't quite shrug off.

He missed them — maybe not their pressure or expectations, but the comfort of being known. Yet every time he thought of calling, guilt gnawed at him. He could already imagine the conversation: disappointment laced with forced patience. The kind that said, We love you, but you failed.

Lucas sighed on the other end. "Alright. Don't make me call them for you."

"Wouldn't dare."

"Good. See you next week."

“Yeah. Take care, Luc.”

When the line clicked dead, the house felt quieter than usual.

Stanley pocketed his phone and stretched, about to head inside when something caught his eye — a small figure down by the beach, half-hidden near the rocks.

Senku.

The kid was sitting in the sand, knees drawn to his chest, his greenish hair sticking out like leeks against the pale sky.

Stanley frowned. That was unusual. The brat was normally bouncing around, asking for toys or candy, or running off after the tide. But now he looked… small. Lost.

Stanley walked down the slope barefoot, the sand cool under his feet as the wind picked up.

“Oi, genius kid,” he called out when he got closer, hands in his pockets. “What’s with the long face? Your experiment blow up or something?”

No answer.

He tried again, quieter this time. “Hey. What happened?”

Senku sniffed, rubbing at his nose with his sleeve, but didn’t look up.

Stanley sighed and dropped down beside him, resting his elbows on his knees. “You’re not gonna talk to me, huh? That’s fine. I can sit here all day. I’m off duty anyway.”

A beat of silence. Then a shaky whisper.

“…My mom wants me back.”

Stanley blinked. “Your… mom?”

Senku nodded, eyes red. “She called Dr. Xeno. Said she’s filing for custody. I heard them talking.” His voice cracked slightly, and he looked away. “She says he’s not my real dad.”

Stanley froze, the breeze suddenly colder against his skin. He’d always known Senku wasn’t Xeno’s biological son — the kid didn’t look like him, for one. But he’d never questioned it. The way Xeno cared for the boy was too natural, too instinctive. Like it didn’t matter what blood ran in his veins.

“…I didn’t even know you had a mom,” Stanley said quietly.

Senku hugged his knees tighter. “I don’t want to go. She never visited before. Dr. Xeno teaches me stuff, lets me help in his lab. He listens. She doesn’t even know what I like.”

Stanley stared out at the horizon — the waves rolling and breaking in slow rhythm. He didn’t know what to say. He wasn’t good with crying kids. Hell, he wasn’t good with emotions,

period.

But something about the way Senku's voice shook made his chest twist.

He glanced toward the neighboring townhouse, where he knew Xeno was probably pacing, overthinking, planning. The man must be trying to figure out what to do — and Stanley could already imagine the storm brewing behind those calm gray eyes.

"Hey," Stanley muttered, reaching over to ruffle the kid's messy hair. "Don't cry, alright? Adults are idiots. They'll figure something out."

Senku sniffed again, not convinced but quieter now.

They sat there in silence for a while — a racer and a kid, both caught between pasts they didn't ask for and futures they weren't sure they wanted.

The tide rolled in closer, brushing their feet with cold foam.

Stanley looked out at the sea one last time and exhaled, a thought flickering through his mind — uninvited, unwelcome, but honest.

If Senku's mother really came to take him…
What would that do to Xeno?

He didn't have an answer.

All he knew was that the calm days on this coast might soon come to an end.

And for the first time in months, Stanley wished he could slow down the world — just a little.

Before it changed again.

Chapter 14: The Man Who Resigned From the Stars

Chapter Notes

> Hey guys hehehe i adjust my tags accordingly so yeah get ready and hold your gadgets while waiting. I love to ragebait you all i hope you dont get pissed. I love you 🌟 and the ody one who supports me on tiktok mwa mwa. Love ragebaiting 🌟 so much

The night air was colder than usual, thick with the faint smell of rain and the distant hum of the sea. Stanley walked up the stone path leading to Xeno's townhouse with Senku half-asleep in his arms, the kid's head resting on his shoulder.

It wasn't the first time he'd walked this path. But tonight, it felt heavier — like every step carried something he couldn't name.

Senku had been bothering him for four months now — showing up for candies, toys, random "science questions" he barely understood. Somewhere between all that pestering, Stanley had gotten used to him. To his curiosity. His odd, logical chatter. The little smirk he wore when he outsmarted him.

And now, knowing that the kid might be gone soon — it didn't sit right.
Not with him.
And definitely not with the man who'd raised him.

Stanley shifted his grip as he reached the porch, his knuckles rapping gently on the door.

It opened after a few seconds, and there stood Dr. Xeno Wingfield — in a black long-sleeved polo, sleeves rolled just above the wrist, hair neat and silver against the dim light. His face looked calm as always, but the slight tremor in his fingers gave him away.

"Stanley," Xeno said softly, surprise flickering in his eyes. "You—"

"I found him near the beach again," Stanley interrupted, lowering his voice so as not to wake Senku. "He didn't want to go home. Figured you'd want him back before he caught a cold."

For a moment, something fragile passed through Xeno's expression — relief mixed with exhaustion. He stepped aside wordlessly.

"Come in."

Stanley carried the kid inside, setting him gently on the couch before Xeno came to scoop him up with practiced care. The way he brushed the boy's hair aside, the way he whispered something soft that Stanley couldn't catch — it was instinct. Pure, quiet love.

Stanley watched him carry Senku upstairs and thought, He's done this a thousand times.

When Xeno came back down, he wasn't the composed NASA scientist Stanley always teased. He looked human — tired, but calm again.

Without a word, he went to the cabinet and pulled out a bottle of whiskey — old, expensive, the kind of drink you don't share unless you mean it.

He poured two glasses, sliding one across the counter. "You didn't have to bring him back yourself."

Stanley shrugged. "The kid looked miserable. Figured I'd spare him the long walk."

Xeno's lips curved slightly, but his eyes were distant. "Thank you, regardless."

Stanley leaned against the counter, taking a sip. The taste burned pleasantly down his throat. He looked at Xeno — really looked at him this time.

He always thought the man was built like a secret — sharp jaw, composed posture, quiet tone that carried weight. But now that the lab coat and political image were gone, Stanley realized something else: Xeno was thin. Slim in the kind of way that came from long hours of work and too many skipped meals.

He wasn't the athletic, sleeper-build genius Stanley imagined him to be. He was just… a man. One who'd carried too much for too long.

Xeno broke the silence first. "You're wondering about him, aren't you? About Senku."

Stanley didn't deny it. "Yeah. He mentioned his mother. Said she wants custody."

Xeno's fingers tightened slightly around his glass. The faintest frown formed on his lips. "So he told you."

"Didn't mean to pry," Stanley said, "but he was crying. I couldn't just ignore him."

Xeno nodded slowly, gaze lowering to the amber liquid in his glass. For a moment, he said nothing. Then his voice came — soft, distant, but steady.

"Byakuya Ishigami. He was an astronaut. A colleague. A friend."

Stanley blinked. "Senku's dad?"

"Yes." Xeno's tone gentled. "Byakuya brought Senku to NASA almost every week. The boy would wander around the labs, disassemble prototypes, ask impossible questions. Everyone adored him." He paused, a faint smile ghosting across his lips. "Byakuya was divorced. His ex-wife wasn't… suited to raising a child who lived half in the stars. When he got custody, Senku thrived. He was bright. Fearless. He reminded us why we loved discovery in the first place."

He took another sip before continuing. “Almost 2 years ago, Byakuya died. It was sudden. No one came for the boy. No relatives, no mother. So I… I did what felt right.”

Stanley’s brows furrowed. “You adopted him.”

“Yes. It wasn’t immediate, of course. NASA wasn’t exactly thrilled. They needed me full-time, and the adoption process demanded stability. Eventually, I made a choice.” He exhaled quietly, his eyes softening as he stared at the half-empty glass. “I resigned. Left everything. Because if I didn’t, Senku wouldn’t have had a home. And he deserved one.”

The words hung heavy between them, layered with something unspoken.

Stanley leaned back, his mind turning it over.
A year ago, Xeno Wingfield — the man touted as one of NASA’s brightest — walked away from everything for the sake of one kid.
And here Stanley was, still bitter over losing one race.

He let out a low whistle. “So that’s why you resigned.”

Xeno nodded. “We moved here soon after. A year and four months ago. It’s been peaceful. Until last week.”

“His mother?”

Xeno’s hand clenched slightly. “Yes. After years of silence, she suddenly calls. Says she wants him back. She claims she’s ready now.”

The edge in his tone was quiet but sharp — the kind of anger you could feel even when it didn’t raise its voice.

Stanley stared at him — at the composed man finally cracking, his emotions slipping past the steel exterior. He’d spent four months in this coastal village and had never seen Xeno angry. Not once. Not when Senku broke a glass beaker. Not when Stanley teased him endlessly or dropped by unannounced.

But now… the calm, stoic scientist looked furious.

And for some reason, Stanley found it almost… refreshing.

“You’re pissed,” he said with a crooked grin.

Xeno shot him a look — tired but honest. “Wouldn’t you be?”

Stanley chuckled, finishing his glass. “Hell yeah, I would. You raise a kid for a year and a half, and suddenly someone thinks they can just take him? I’d be livid.”

Xeno didn’t respond, but the faint twitch at the corner of his mouth said enough.

For a moment, neither spoke. The wind outside carried the sound of the waves, steady and endless.

Stanley leaned his arms on the counter, glancing at Xeno's reflection in the glass window.
He wasn't a disappointment, not by any measure.
He'd given up the stars for something — someone — that mattered more.

And compared to that, Stanley's so-called "failure" on the track felt small. Petty.

Maybe, for the first time, he understood why he'd come here.
Why Lucas had sent him.
Why the world had forced him to stop.

Because somewhere between the noise and the silence, people like Xeno learned how to build meaning from loss.

And maybe Stanley could too.

He set his glass down gently. "You did good, Doc."

Xeno blinked, turning to him. "Pardon?"

"You heard me," Stanley said, half-grinning. "You made the right call. Not a lot of people would've given up everything for a kid. Guess you're not as disappointing as I thought."

Xeno chuckled softly — the first genuine laugh Stanley had heard from him all night.
"Coming from you, that's almost a compliment."

"Almost."

They shared a quiet moment then — two men who'd lost different things but found an odd, unexpected peace in the same place.

Outside, the waves rolled gently against the shore. Inside, the silence was warm.

For the first time since his accident, Stanley didn't feel like he was drifting.

And for the first time since resigning, Xeno didn't feel alone.

Chapter 15: The Visit

The morning was calm, the kind of calm that made the sound of the waves feel louder than they should. Stanley stood in front of the mirror, brushing through his hair with the laziest effort possible. The mirror reflected a man who hadn't shaved in two days, wearing a loose shirt and a pair of shorts — a far cry from the McLaren racer the world once called the coldest driver on the circuit.

He didn't look like that man anymore. And for once, he didn't mind.

A knock came at the door. Three quick raps — familiar.

"Don't tell me you got lost in paradise, Snyder," a cheerful voice called from outside.

Stanley grinned, tossing the brush aside before pulling the door open. "Lucas," he greeted, leaning casually on the doorframe. "You look too clean for this village."

Lucas Rivera — McLaren's golden-tongued manager — stood there in his tailored vest and sunglasses, grinning like he'd just caught a winning deal. His black hair was neatly combed back, and he held a folder under one arm.

"And you," Lucas shot back, scanning Stanley from head to toe, "look like you joined a fishing club."

"Don't tempt me," Stanley muttered. "Come in."

Lucas stepped into the townhouse, eyes flicking over the cozy but elegant interior. "Well, at least the villa I set up for you didn't go to waste. I thought you'd start using the couch as a garage."

"Thought about it," Stanley said, pouring him a drink. "But the ocean view won."

"Good. I was worried you'd start haunting a bar." Lucas accepted the glass with a smirk, taking a sip before setting his folder down. "Alright, updates. McLaren's keeping your seat open. They've got a rookie filling in temporarily — kid's decent, but nothing like you. Sponsors are patient… for now. Six months left on your contract, so try not to cause a scandal."

Stanley scoffed. "You came all the way here just to babysit me?"

Lucas tilted his head. "Let's just say I wanted to see if the great Stanley Snyder can actually live like a normal person."

"Define normal."

"Not crashing cars, yelling at journalists, or dodging paparazzi."

Stanley chuckled, settling on the couch. "Then yeah, I'm doing great."

Before Lucas could reply, a faint laugh echoed from the kitchen.

“Stanley, you forgot the eggs!”

It was a small, bright voice — Senku’s. The boy came skipping in from the side door, holding a grocery bag almost half his size. His hair stuck out in every direction, his shirt slightly wrinkled, but his grin was proud.

Lucas blinked. “You have… a kid?”

“Borrowed,” Stanley said quickly. “He comes with the neighborhood.”

“Neighborhood kid who shops for groceries?”

“Advanced model.”

Senku squinted at Lucas. “Are you the man from the car posters in Stanley’s drawer?”

Stanley choked on his drink. “Kid—!”

Lucas burst out laughing. “Oh, this I like.” He crouched slightly to Senku’s level. “And you are?”

“Senku Ishigami,” the boy replied smartly, puffing his chest. “Future scientist. Stanley’s assistant.”

Lucas grinned. “Assistant, huh? Brave of you.”

Before Stanley could retort, another voice cut through — deeper, smooth, calm.

“Senku.”

The three turned toward the door.

Dr. Xeno Wingfield stood there, framed by sunlight, wearing a full charcoal-gray suit that fit him perfectly. A briefcase hung loosely in one hand, and his silver hair was combed back neatly. He looked like he’d just stepped out of a boardroom instead of a beachside house.

Stanley blinked. Is this the same guy who wears pajamas and lectures about thermodynamics over coffee?

Senku ran up immediately. “Dad!”

The man smiled faintly, bending to pat the boy’s head. “Were you good while I was gone?”

“Always!” Senku said proudly. “Stanley and I went to the store!”

“Ah,” Xeno said, glancing toward Stanley with a knowing tilt of his head. “So that’s where the eggs went.”

Stanley smirked. “Hey, at least we got food this time. Could’ve been just ice cream.”

Xeno only shook his head, the faintest curve of amusement tugging at his lips before he noticed Lucas.

“Ah, you must be the manager,” he said, extending a hand politely. “Dr. Xeno Wingfield.”

Lucas stood quickly, shaking it with practiced ease. “Lucas Rivera, McLaren Management. So you’re the reason this guy hasn’t lost his mind yet.”

Xeno smiled lightly. “I can’t take credit for that. Though Senku might have helped.”

Stanley rolled his eyes. “You mean caused most of it.”

Senku laughed.

The mood was surprisingly comfortable — too comfortable, Lucas thought. Stanley looked relaxed, grounded even. Not the restless, competitive man he used to drag out of training rooms.

“So,” Lucas said, sipping his drink, “you’ve really settled here, huh?”

Stanley shrugged. “Something like that.”

Lucas leaned back, studying him. “You look different.”

“Older?”

“Peaceful,” Lucas corrected. “That’s new.”

Stanley chuckled quietly, glancing toward Xeno and Senku. The doctor was talking softly to the kid, crouched low enough that their heads almost touched. It was an image he didn’t expect to feel anything about — but somehow, it made something tighten in his chest.

“Yeah,” Stanley said at last, his voice low. “Guess I found something better than noise.”

Lucas raised an eyebrow but didn’t press. He’d seen this look before — the calm after a storm. Whatever had changed Stanley, it wasn’t temporary.

“Enjoy it while you can,” he said, standing. “Because when McLaren calls you back, I’m not letting you slip away again.”

Stanley grinned. “We’ll see.”

As Lucas left later that evening, the sound of the car faded down the road, leaving only the rhythm of waves and the laughter of a boy in the next room.

Xeno stepped out onto the porch beside Stanley, still in his suit, sleeves slightly wrinkled now.

“You clean up nice, Doc,” Stanley teased.

Xeno smiled faintly. “I had a meeting downtown. The court hearing’s been set for next month.”

Stanley’s grin faded a little. “You gonna be okay?”

Xeno’s gaze turned toward the sea, silver eyes reflecting the horizon. “I’ll have to be. For him.”

Stanley nodded, watching the same horizon. “Yeah. For him.”

The two men stood there for a while, saying nothing more. Just listening to the tide — calm, steady, unbroken.

In that silence, Stanley thought he could live like this forever.

Chapter 16: The Track

A week later, the sleepy rhythm of coastal life cracked open under the sound of roaring engines.

Stanley hadn't realized how much he missed it — the smell of burning rubber, the weight of the steering wheel in his hands, the raw hum of a machine tuned to perfection. For the first time in months, he was home.

The small private track on the outskirts of the city wasn't McLaren's official ground, but it was enough. A few local racers were doing laps, mechanics were scattered around, and Lucas stood near the pit wall, his usual clipboard in hand, sunglasses perched like armor.

Stanley's helmet was under his arm, his suit zipped halfway. Beside him was a boy barely reaching his elbow, bouncing excitedly — Senku, clutching a pair of bright orange earmuffs.

"Kid, you sure you can handle the noise?" Stanley asked, eyebrow raised.

Senku grinned. "Noise means energy. I like energy."

"Yeah? Let's see if you still like it after an hour of it."

Lucas sighed from across the pit. "Stan, I said I'll consider—"

"You already did," Stanley cut in smoothly, patting Senku's head. "He's with me."

"Stan—"

"Look, he's seven, not a bomb. He'll wear protection, stay behind the line, and behave. Right, Senku?"

Senku nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, sir!"

Lucas pinched the bridge of his nose. "If Xeno finds out—"

"He won't," Stanley said with a smirk. "He's in court prep all week. He needs the kid distracted."

Lucas exhaled, defeated. "You're impossible."

"Correct."

And with that, Stanley turned toward the car — a sleek silver prototype McLaren had sent over for him to test. It wasn't just a machine; it was freedom incarnate. He slipped his helmet on, climbed in, and with a single press, the engine roared alive.

Senku's eyes widened, sparkling like stars. "It's so loud!"

Lucas crouched beside him. “It’s music to some people.”

“For him,” Senku said, pointing to Stanley, “it’s more like breathing.”

Lucas paused, glancing down at the kid — surprised by how perceptive he was.

Stanley completed his warm-up lap, the car cutting clean through the bends, the tires gripping with precision. Every movement was muscle memory. Every turn, a heartbeat.

Senku leaned forward at the railing, eyes tracking the blur of silver. “He’s fast.”

Lucas chuckled. “He’s one of the best there is. Used to think the world was too slow for him.”

“But now?”

Lucas smiled faintly. “Now, I think he found a reason to slow down.”

The laps continued. Every time Stanley flew by, Senku waved his arms wildly — and sometimes, he swore Stanley actually waved back mid-turn.

When the session ended, Stanley climbed out of the car, sweat sticking to his neck. Senku ran up immediately, waving a water bottle.

“That was amazing! How does it go that fast?!”

Stanley chuckled, crouching to his level. “Physics, friction, and a lot of expensive parts.”

“Can I learn that?”

“If you can sit still for more than ten minutes.”

Senku frowned, pretending to think. “Maybe… eight.”

Lucas laughed from behind. “You two are going to get along too well.”

“Already do,” Stanley said, ruffling the kid’s hair. “He’s a pain, but a smart one.”

“Pain with purpose,” Senku said proudly.

That night, when they drove back to the house, Senku fell asleep in the passenger seat, clutching the earmuffs like treasure.

Stanley glanced at him, then at the road ahead. Something about it — the calm, the silence, the soft sound of the kid’s breathing — it felt grounding. He hadn’t realized until now how much he needed that balance.

He pulled up to the house quietly. Xeno’s study light was still on through the window.

Stanley carried Senku inside, careful not to wake him. Xeno opened the door softly. He looked tired — shadows under his eyes, hair slightly undone.

“Long day?” Stanley whispered.

“Long week,” Xeno murmured. His gaze fell to Senku sleeping against Stanley’s shoulder. “He didn’t give you trouble, did he?”

“None,” Stanley said softly. “Actually, he was perfect.”

Xeno smiled faintly — that rare, tired kind of smile that looked almost fragile. “Thank you. You didn’t have to.”

“I wanted to,” Stanley said.

Their eyes met briefly — and for a fleeting moment, something unspoken passed between them.

Then Stanley looked away, heading for the stairs. “Get some sleep, Doc. You look like you’re about to start scolding gravity for existing.”

Xeno huffed quietly. “If only gravity would listen.”

Stanley chuckled as he disappeared up the stairs.

And for the first time in days, the house felt… whole again.

Chapter 17: The Little Mechanic

Chapter Notes

Yep this is the one i teased at tiktok the other day

The following weeks slipped by faster than Stanley's laps on the track.

Each morning started the same — Senku knocking on his door with a wide grin and a "Stanley! Are we going to the track today?" The kid's boundless energy was a strange contrast to Stanley's usual indifference, but he couldn't deny it — he liked having him around.

By now, the McLaren test crew at the local track had grown used to the small, leek-haired boy following their star racer like a duckling. At first, they were wary, but it only took a few days for Senku to win everyone over.

He didn't just watch; he asked. Constantly.

"What's this thing that goes vrrrrr before the car starts?"
"That's the turbocharger, kid."

"What's this sticky black stuff?"
"Rubber residue — we call it marbles. Don't touch it."

"Why do the tires have different colors?"
"That's the compounds. Softer ones are faster but wear quicker."

The mechanics began jokingly calling him "Chief Engineer Senku."

Stanley would catch glimpses of him crouched beside the pit wall, eyes wide, studying every movement of the crew like it was magic. Lucas even stopped scolding Stanley for bringing him along — though only after Senku called him "Uncle Lucas" one afternoon.

Lucas pretended to hate it. "I'm not your uncle."

Senku only smirked. "You give me candy. That makes you family."

The entire pit burst out laughing, and Lucas turned away to hide the faint smile tugging at his lips. After that, he started keeping a few sweets in his pocket — "for emergencies," he said. But everyone knew better.

Stanley often found Senku sitting on a toolbox, swinging his legs, humming quietly as he watched the cars fly by. When Stanley finished his laps, he'd jog over, still in his suit, and the

boy would immediately bombard him with questions.

“Did you go faster than yesterday?”
“Yeah.”
“Can I see the data?”
“What are you, my engineer now?”
“Maybe!”

Stanley laughed every time — genuinely laughed. Something that used to feel rusty now came easy.

The track crew adored seeing this side of him. The infamous Stanley Snyder — the cold, unshakable racer known for his distance and perfectionism — now carried a sleepy seven-year-old on his shoulders between pit breaks, explaining aerodynamics like a bedtime story.

But the biggest secret of all?

They hadn’t told Xeno.

The moment Senku first tagged along, Stanley had sworn the whole crew to silence. “Not a word to the doc, got it? He’d lock the kid in a library if he found out.”

The team agreed without hesitation — partly because they liked the kid, but mostly because watching Stanley act like an older brother was far too entertaining to risk losing.

And so, every day became their little conspiracy.

Senku wore ear protection, stayed in safe zones, and by the second week, even learned how to wipe the tires and hand Stanley a towel after practice. “Here, so you don’t look gross in front of the cameras,” he’d tease.

By the third week, Lucas caught Stanley letting the boy sit in the car — engine off, of course — tiny hands gripping the wheel as he made zooming sounds.

Lucas leaned on the doorframe. “You’re going to get murdered when Xeno finds out.”

Stanley smirked. “Then bury me with the McLaren.”

“Or with the kid’s toy wrench,” Lucas muttered, shaking his head.

Senku beamed from the driver’s seat. “Can I go fast now?”

“Not unless you grow ten more years and twenty more inches, Einstein,” Stanley said.

“Fine,” Senku said with mock seriousness. “But when I’m big, I’ll be faster than you.”

The challenge hung in the air, and Stanley laughed — that rare, unguarded sound that made Lucas glance over with quiet satisfaction.

“You know,” Lucas said when Senku wandered off to pester the mechanics again, “you’re different around him.”

Stanley didn’t answer right away. He just watched Senku crouch beside a mechanic, eyes bright as he asked another endless question.

“Maybe,” Stanley said finally. “He reminds me that not everything needs to be about control.”

Lucas tilted his head. “That’s new. You never struck me as the sentimental type.”

Stanley smirked faintly. “Don’t tell anyone. Ruins my reputation.”

“Too late,” Lucas said. “The whole team’s already calling you Dadley Snyder.”

Stanley groaned. “I hate you people.”

But his eyes were warm.

That afternoon, as the sun dipped and the practice ended, Senku fell asleep in the back of the car again — helmet slightly too big for his head, still clutching a small wrench like a toy.

Stanley looked at him through the rearview mirror and smiled.

He’d told himself this was just temporary — just babysitting until Xeno sorted his custody mess. But somewhere between the laps, the noise, and the laughter, Stanley realized something unsettling.

He didn’t want this to end.

And that thought — that quiet, foreign ache — followed him all the way home.

Chapter 18: Quiet Gravity

Chapter Notes

> I shouldve made them kiss but nah, anyways two chaps for today no chap for tomorrow and the next day.

The house was bathed in the soft orange glow of dusk when Stanley carried Senku upstairs. The kid had fallen asleep mid-sentence in the car again, still clutching his miniature wrench like a talisman.

“Come on, kid,” Stanley murmured, pushing the door open with his foot. “You’re getting heavy.”

Senku mumbled something incoherent — something about engines and candy — before turning his face into Stanley’s shoulder.

He laid the boy gently on the bed, pulling the light blanket over him. For a long second, Stanley just stood there, watching him breathe. There was something disarming about the stillness — no questions, no noise, just the sound of waves outside and the faint hum of life that this house seemed to hold.

He brushed the kid’s wild green hair out of his face and turned off the lamp.

Then, quietly, he made his way downstairs.

The air was filled with the faint smell of black coffee and paper — an oddly comforting mix. Stanley expected the kitchen to be dark, but there was light spilling from the counter.

And there he was.

Xeno.

Sitting at the small wooden table, a mug beside him, surrounded by scattered papers — custody documents, legal drafts, court notes. His hair was pulled back loosely, a few strands falling to his forehead. The sleeves of his black shirt were rolled up to his elbows, and he was so focused that he didn’t even notice Stanley at first.

He looked nothing like the polished NASA scientist from the news — no cold perfection, no distant intellect. Just… human. Quiet. Tired. Real.

Stanley leaned against the doorway, arms crossed, watching. He didn’t know why — maybe because in that moment, Xeno looked peaceful in a way he hadn’t seen before. Or maybe

because there was something magnetic about how calm he remained even with a storm hanging over him.

“...You can stop staring anytime now.”

Xeno’s voice broke the silence — smooth, calm, but unmistakably aware. He didn’t look up from the papers, but the corner of his mouth twitched slightly.

Stanley blinked, caught off guard. “How’d you know?”

“You’re about as subtle as a V8 engine,” Xeno said dryly, eyes still on the document.

Stanley chuckled under his breath. “You’ve got jokes now.”

“Only when sleep deprivation forces creativity.”

Stanley walked in, grabbing a glass from the counter and pouring himself water. “You’re gonna fry your brain reading this late.”

“I’ve done worse under rocket deadlines.”

He took a sip, leaning on the counter opposite Xeno. “You know, normal people unwind with music or TV.”

“I prefer logic,” Xeno replied simply, signing something at the bottom of a page.

Stanley studied him — the way his brow furrowed slightly when reading, how his lips pressed together in quiet focus. There was a strange steadiness about him that made Stanley’s chest tighten unexpectedly.

It wasn’t attraction — not exactly. It was admiration, laced with something softer he didn’t have a word for.

And then Xeno finally looked up.

Their eyes met.

For a moment, neither spoke. The air was heavy, not with tension, but with something slower — quiet, electric. Stanley didn’t look away this time; neither did Xeno. It was like gravity — a silent pull neither of them had prepared for.

Then, almost at the same time, they both blinked and looked elsewhere — Stanley at the coffee mug, Xeno at his papers.

“Well,” Stanley muttered, clearing his throat, “don’t stay up too late, Doc. Kid’ll need you tomorrow.”

“I could say the same to you,” Xeno replied softly.

Stanley smirked faintly and pushed off the counter. “Good night.”

“Good night, Stanley.”

As he walked back toward the stairs, Stanley caught his reflection in the dark window — the faint smile he hadn’t realized was there.

Upstairs, Senku shifted in his sleep, mumbling something about racing.

Downstairs, Xeno exhaled slowly, closing the last file for the night.

And for one quiet, fragile moment — the house felt like a home.

Chapter 19: The Sound of Panic

Chapter Notes

> NO CAUSE I JUST SAW A SPOILER OF LUCI DYING LIKE NO NO NO NO. JUST NO PLEASE HE IS MY FAVE CHARACTER IN THE HH VERSE (AND VOX, JUST GOONING FOR HIM) BUT PLEASE NO. IM LOSING MY MIND RIGHT NOW AFTER I SAW THAT AND I AM NOT OKAY

It was supposed to be a light morning. The kind that started with sea breeze, a cup of bad coffee, and Senku bouncing in the passenger seat of the McLaren van, humming some song from a science show.

Stanley couldn't help but grin as the kid pressed his face to the window. "You know, you look like a puppy when you do that."

Senku gasped. "A smart puppy, right?"

"Sure," Stanley chuckled, tapping the steering wheel. "Genius-level mutt."

By now, the whole team was used to their arrival. Senku waved to everyone the moment they entered the pit area — the mechanics, the interns, even Lucas, who tried to hide a smile as the boy ran up to him.

"Uncle Lucas! Look! I made a drawing of Stanley's car!"

Lucas crouched down to take the crayon sketch — a chaotic explosion of red and orange scribbles. "You forgot the sponsor logos."

Senku crossed his arms. "Logos are boring."

Stanley leaned over with a smirk. "Don't tell that to McLaren's marketing team."

Everyone laughed, and the day went on.

Stanley had finished his test laps by noon. The track was quiet again, save for the gentle hum of wind and the clatter of tools. Senku was wandering between the cars, his energy still burning like sunlight.

"Hey, kid," Stanley called, tossing him a bottle of water. "Stay off the cars, yeah? Those aren't jungle gyms."

"Got it!" Senku replied.

Which, of course, meant he was about to do exactly that.

Stanley turned his back for one second — long enough to remove his gloves — when he heard it.

A shout.
A metallic clang.
A sickening thud.

Then silence.

“Senku?”

He spun around. The small figure that had been climbing onto the side of the idle race car was now crumpled on the ground, clutching his leg.

Stanley’s heart stopped.

“Senku!”

The sound of his voice tore through the air as he bolted forward. Lucas and two mechanics followed instantly. The boy was trying not to cry — his lip trembled, eyes glassy — but one look at his twisted foot said everything.

“Don’t move him,” Lucas barked.

Stanley dropped to his knees beside Senku, his hands shaking as he brushed hair out of the boy’s face. “Hey—hey, look at me, genius. You okay? You breathing?”

Senku nodded, jaw tight, clearly trying to be brave. “I-I slipped. I’m fine.”

“You’re not fine.” Stanley’s voice cracked, raw. “Don’t you ever—” He stopped himself, biting down hard on the surge of panic threatening to take over.

It was worse than any crash he’d ever had. Worse than the fire, the screaming tires, the chaos. Because this time, it wasn’t him.

“Call an ambulance. Now!”

The track exploded into movement. Lucas was already dialing, shouting into the phone. The team hovered helplessly, waiting. Stanley stayed beside the boy, gripping his small hand.

Senku was pale but stubborn, whispering through the pain, “Don’t… don’t tell Dad. He’ll be mad.”

Stanley froze. “Senku—”

“He won’t let me come here again,” the boy mumbled, tears slipping out despite himself. “Please don’t tell him…”

Stanley swallowed hard. “Kid, he needs to know.”

“Please.”

For the first time, Stanley had no comeback. No teasing, no cool sarcasm. Just fear. The kind that clawed at your chest and wouldn’t let go.

The ambulance came. The sirens cut through the air, and Stanley rode in the back, holding Senku’s hand the entire way. The kid didn’t let go.

At the hospital, everything blurred — paperwork, X-rays, doctors. The words “fracture” and “recovery time” swam in his head, but all he could focus on was the small boy on the hospital bed, blinking through exhaustion.

Lucas stood at the door, grim-faced, while the rest of the team hovered outside, guilt written all over their faces.

Stanley sat beside Senku, his elbow on his knee, head in his hand. His heart was still racing. “You scared the hell outta me, kid.”

Senku smiled weakly. “Sorry…”

“Don’t be sorry,” Stanley said softly. “Just… don’t do that again.”

He exhaled, then pulled out his phone. His hands trembled slightly as he pressed Xeno’s contact.

It rang twice before a tired, formal voice answered. “Stanley, I’m in the middle of a—”

“Xeno.”

The tone of his name — clipped, low, urgent — made Xeno pause.

“What happened?”

“Senku’s hurt.”

There was silence. Then the faint shuffle of papers and a sharp intake of breath.

“I’m coming.”

The line cut.

Stanley looked at the sleeping boy, then at the door. The pit crew still lingered in the hall, whispering nervously. Lucas rubbed his temples. “He’s going to kill us.”

“Let him try,” Stanley muttered. “Just… make sure Senku doesn’t blame himself.”

It wasn’t long before the door swung open.

Xeno entered, still in a dark suit, the air around him tight with restrained panic. He froze when he saw the room — Senku in bed, his small leg in a cast, surrounded by Stanley, Lucas, and the team looking like guilty children.

For a moment, Xeno didn't move. His gaze locked on the cast, the IV line, the pale face of the boy he'd raised.

Then, slowly, his eyes lifted — to Stanley.

No words. No anger. Just a look — one that said everything.

Stanley stood, his throat dry. "He'll be fine. Doctor says clean break. No surgery."

Xeno's jaw tightened. He walked past him, kneeling beside the bed, brushing a hand through Senku's hair.

The boy stirred, eyes opening slightly. "Xeno… I'm sorry…"

Xeno's voice was soft — too soft. "No, my boy. You don't apologize for accidents."

But Stanley could see it — the flicker of worry, of realization, of understanding.

He knew.

He knew Senku hadn't been at home.
He knew exactly where he'd been.

And when Xeno finally turned to look at Stanley again, there was no need for questions.

The quiet, piercing disappointment in his eyes said enough to crush him completely.

Stanley looked away first.

For once in his life — the racer who had faced fire and death without flinching — couldn't meet someone's gaze.

Chapter 20: Static Between Them

Chapter Notes

> As i said there would be no updates for the next 2 days, but I need to let you know that if I haven't uploaded anything for the next 2-5 days, it's because a typhoon is about to hit the Philippines as of the moment i had uploaded this. I just hope this typhoon passes smoothly with no casualties. A power outage is highly possible, but I'll upload as soon as I can once everything is cleared and okay. Thank you for your understanding. <33333

The villa was too quiet.

Stanley hadn't realized how much sound Senku brought into his days until it was gone — the rapid-fire questions, the scuffling of small feet on tile, the endless "why" that came with every conversation. Now, all that filled the townhouse was the hum of the fridge and the soft tick of the clock.

He hadn't gone to the hospital since that night. Lucas had told him the kid was fine, recovering well. But Stanley didn't ask for updates after that. He didn't know what to do with the guilt still burning through his chest like exhaust fumes.

He'd tried to distract himself — early runs on the beach, tinkering with the car engine, staring at the ocean until the horizon blurred — but the silence always crept back.

He didn't miss racing. He missed them.

Every time he passed by the small shelf where Senku's toy car sat, he had to look away.

Meanwhile, across town, in a hospital room painted too white, Senku woke up.

His left leg was in a cast, resting awkwardly on a pillow. The light from the window was soft and gray.

Xeno was there, seated by the bed, still in the same white shirt he wore last night. He looked exhausted, the kind of exhaustion that no sleep could fix.

Senku blinked slowly, then frowned. "Where's Stanley?"

The question hit Xeno harder than he expected.

"He's… at home," Xeno replied carefully. "You should rest, Senku."

Senku pouted, crossing his arms. "He said we'd go see the engines again today."

“Not for a while,” Xeno said gently, brushing the boy’s hair aside.

“That’s unfair!” Senku protested, trying to sit up. “He didn’t do anything wrong!”

“Senku.”

The single word was enough to quiet him, but not to stop the tears gathering at the corners of his eyes.

“You don’t understand,” he mumbled, voice cracking. “He’s my friend. You’re mad at him, aren’t you?”

Xeno looked away. “He made a mistake.”

“So what?” Senku shot back. “You make mistakes too!”

That stung — more than the boy could ever know.

Xeno exhaled slowly and leaned back in his chair, covering his face for a moment. “You need to focus on getting better.”

Senku glared, stubborn as ever. “I will. But when I do, I’m going to see him.”

Three days later, a knock echoed through Stanley’s door.

He hesitated before opening it — and froze.

Xeno stood there, tired eyes, dark circles, and a paper bag in hand. He looked the same, but not. There was something softer beneath the restraint.

“Can I come in?” Xeno asked quietly.

Stanley stepped aside without a word.

They sat at the counter. Xeno placed the bag down. Inside was a bottle of whiskey. “He wouldn’t stop asking for you,” Xeno said simply.

Stanley let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding. “He’s okay?”

“He’s healing.”

Silence stretched between them again, but it was different now — not sharp and cold, just fragile.

“I overreacted,” Xeno admitted, fingers tracing the rim of his glass. “You were right about him needing to live. I just—” He paused, the words catching. “I’ve lost too much already. I couldn’t bear the thought of losing him too.”

Stanley nodded slowly. “And I shouldn’t have gone behind your back. You had a right to be angry.”

Xeno glanced at him then, faint amusement flickering in his eyes. “You’re terrible at apologies.”

Stanley huffed a laugh. “Never had to practice them much.”

They both smiled — a small, tentative one, but real.

The silence that followed was comfortable this time.

Finally, Xeno said, “He wants to see you tomorrow. I told him… I’d bring you.”

Stanley blinked. “You sure?”

Xeno poured the whiskey into two glasses, pushed one toward him, and raised his own. “Positive.”

They clinked their glasses softly — not in celebration, but in quiet understanding.

Outside, the waves crashed against the shore, and for the first time in weeks, the sound didn’t feel empty.

Chapter 21: Familiar Stubbornness

Chapter Notes

> Did you miss me?? Gosh we still dont have power yet its been like whag 5 days ughhh, im just using my mobile data to update this. If i havent replied to any of your comments or anything because chrome is the only thing i can open huhu anyways thank you for waiting and here ill give you 5 chapters for today

The hospital smelled faintly of antiseptic and lemon polish — sharp, clean, and cold. It wasn't the kind of place Stanley liked staying in, but tonight, he didn't plan on leaving.

Senku's room was quiet except for the soft hum of the machines and the rhythmic beeping near his bed. The boy was awake when Stanley arrived, face lighting up like a switch was flipped.

"Stan!" Senku yelled, grinning wide despite the cast on his leg. "You came!"

Stanley smirked. "Of course, kid. You think I'd let you hog all the attention while I'm out there alone?"

Senku laughed, a little too loud for the nurse's liking, but Stanley didn't care. He crouched beside the bed, resting his arms on the rail. "How's the leg? Still attached?"

Senku nodded proudly. "The doctor said I'll be able to walk soon! But Xeno says no running."

"Yeah," Stanley muttered, glancing briefly toward the corner where Xeno stood with folded arms, watching. "He's a tough one."

Senku puffed his cheeks. "He worries too much."

"Maybe," Stanley replied, looking at the kid fondly. "But you'd better listen to him anyway. You scared everyone back there."

Senku looked guilty, just for a moment. "Sorry, Stan."

Stanley shook his head. "Nah. Just don't make a habit of falling off cars, yeah?"

That earned him a small laugh. For a while, the room was filled with that — light chatter, soft laughter, and the warmth of familiarity. Xeno didn't say much. He stayed back, hands in pockets, eyes shifting between the two of them — the man who crashed and the boy who jumped — and wondered when his life became this tangled.

By midnight, Senku had fallen asleep. His small hand rested loosely on the blanket, chest rising and falling in steady rhythm.

“You should go home,” Xeno said quietly.

Stanley was sitting on the couch by the window, one arm draped over the backrest, staring out at the city lights. He didn’t even look up. “Nah.”

“Stanley.”

He grunted in reply.

“You can’t stay here. It’s against the hospital’s policy for non-family to—”

“Didn’t stop me last time I crashed,” Stanley said lazily.

“That’s different.”

“Not really,” he countered, eyes still on the skyline. “Back then, you visited me too.”

Xeno paused, lips pressing into a thin line. He didn’t expect Stanley to remember that.

“I’ll stay on the couch,” Stanley continued, cutting off any protest. “You can pretend I’m not here.”

“You’re impossible.”

Stanley smiled, not even trying to deny it. “So I’ve been told.”

For a while, Xeno said nothing. He checked Senku’s vitals, adjusted the blanket, organized the table — anything to keep busy. But when he turned again, Stanley was still there, head leaning against the wall, eyes half-shut from exhaustion.

He looked—peaceful, almost boyish without the smirk or the tension in his jaw.

Xeno sighed quietly, walked over to the linen closet, and pulled out a spare blanket. He hesitated for just a second before draping it gently over Stanley’s shoulders. The man didn’t stir, just breathed deeply, like the weight of the world had finally slipped off him for one night.

Xeno lingered there for a moment, looking between the two — Senku in the bed, Stanley on the couch.

A small smile tugged at the corner of his mouth.

He’d dealt with Senku’s stubbornness for a year and a half now — the pouting, the clever excuses, the way the boy always tried to outsmart him. And now, here was Stanley Snyder: older, taller, louder, but somehow exactly the same brand of stubborn.

Maybe it wasn’t such a bad thing.

He turned off the overhead light, leaving only the soft glow from the monitors. Then, quietly, he sat back down by Senku's side, resting his chin in his hand, watching both of them — the two stubborn souls that had somehow found their way into his quiet, carefully built world.

For the first time in weeks, he didn't feel quite so alone.

And in the soft quiet of the hospital night, Xeno thought, perhaps this is what peace looks like — noisy, stubborn, and utterly unexpected.

Chapter 22: The Call and the Question

Chapter Notes

Also while the typhoon i started the storyline of masquerade of crowns ugh im giggling

The roar of the engine died down, replaced by the slow clicking of cooling metal. The track shimmered under the late afternoon sun, waves of heat rising from the asphalt. Stanley pulled off his gloves, breathing heavily but satisfied — his body still hummed from the rush of speed, that familiar symphony of control and chaos that always made him feel alive.

“Nice run, Snyder,” one of the engineers called from the pit wall. “Looks like you’re getting your rhythm back.”

Stanley gave a short nod, tossing the gloves onto the dashboard. “About time.”

He climbed out of the car, helmet under one arm, when his phone started buzzing in his pocket. The moment he saw the name flashing on the screen, his heart did a small, involuntary jump.

Senku.

He picked up quickly, turning away from the pit. “Hey, kid. You’re supposed to be sleeping, not blowing up my phone.”

“Stan!” The boy’s voice was bright and full of excitement. “I’m getting discharged today!”

Stanley blinked. “Already?”

“Yep! The doctor said I can go home if I don’t run around too much. Xeno’s coming to get me, but I told him you should come too!”

Stanley chuckled. “Oh, you did, huh?”

“Please?” Senku begged through the line. “Lucas can come too!”

The pit crew had started gathering nearby, overhearing parts of the conversation. When Stanley turned, they were all grinning like idiots.

“What?” he asked suspiciously.

The youngest mechanic piped up. “Was that the kid?”

“Yeah.”

“When’s he out?”

“Today.”

A collective sigh spread across the garage — the kind that wasn’t disappointment but more like relief and affection mixed together. One of them muttered, “Guess we gotta get him something.”

Another engineer, a woman with oil streaked across her cheek, added, “I’ll grab some model cars. He loved those engines last time.”

Stanley raised an eyebrow. “You guys don’t have to—”

“Shut up, boss,” she said with a grin. “You’re just mad the kid likes us more than you.”

“Not possible,” Stanley shot back, but there was a smile tugging at his lips.

An hour later, Lucas arrived, sleeves rolled up, clipboard in hand, and that annoyingly knowing look on his face.

“So,” he said, leaning against the passenger side of Stanley’s car. “We’re going to pick up your little sidekick?”

Stanley glanced up from his phone. “He’s not my sidekick.”

“Right. He’s your kid, then?”

“Shut it, Lucas.”

Lucas laughed, patting him on the shoulder. “You’ve gone full Dadley again.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Too late. The team’s already using it.”

Stanley groaned, sliding into the driver’s seat. “You’re all idiots.”

Lucas smirked, buckling in. “Takes one to manage one.”

They hit the road, the car humming quietly between them. For a few minutes, the only sound was the engine and the occasional honk from passing cars. Then, out of nowhere, Lucas asked, “So, you like him?”

Stanley’s grip on the steering wheel tightened. “What?”

“Xeno.” Lucas said it so casually that it made Stanley’s head jerk slightly.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

Lucas shrugged, half-smiling. “You’ve been... different since the crash. More grounded. And every time someone mentions the guy, you either clam up or get that look — the one like

you're trying to remember how to breathe."

Stanley stared straight ahead, the sunset bleeding orange light across the windshield. "You're imagining things."

"Am I?" Lucas tilted his head. "You freaked out when he showed up at the hospital, then you stayed the night there. And don't even get me started on how panicked you were when the kid got hurt. So, come on. Just tell me — do you like him?"

Stanley didn't answer. The words sat on his tongue like lead.

Lucas waited. When silence stretched too long, his voice softened. "Or are you just scared you might?"

Stanley's jaw tightened. His eyes flicked to the rearview mirror, where the dying light of day caught the outline of his own reflection — sharp, tired, but uncertain.

"I don't know," he muttered finally. "I've never thought about that kind of thing before."

Stanley gave a short laugh —humorless, self-deprecating. "Never had time. Racing took everything. And before that, my parents did." He glanced briefly at Lucas. "I've never been interested in anyone like that."

Lucas nodded slowly, understanding dawning in his eyes. He'd known Stanley Snyder for years — the man who could charm an audience and silence a boardroom, but never once had he been seen with someone outside his career. There were rumors, of course, but all empty talk.

"You know," Lucas said quietly, "maybe it's not about liking men or women. Maybe it's just about liking him."

Stanley didn't respond, but his fingers drummed against the wheel — restless, thoughtful.

Lucas smiled faintly. "You don't have to figure it out now. Just don't run from it, yeah?"

The silence that followed was heavy, not uncomfortable but full of things unsaid.

By the time they pulled into the hospital parking lot, the sky had darkened. The city lights shimmered in the reflection of the glass building.

Stanley killed the engine and exhaled slowly. "You talk too much, you know that?"

"Part of the job," Lucas replied with a grin.

As they walked inside, the team's small gift bag in Stanley's hand, Lucas lingered just a step behind him. He watched as Stanley's shoulders straightened, his usual swagger returning. But there was something else in his eyes — a flicker of confusion, maybe fear, maybe curiosity.

Whatever it was, Lucas didn't press further.

Because for the first time since he'd known him, Stanley Snyder looked like a man who wasn't afraid of crashing — but afraid of feeling.

And that, Lucas thought, was far more dangerous than any race track.

Chapter 23: Discharge Day

Hospitals always made Stanley restless. The smell of sterile hallways, the distant beeps, the quiet shuffle of nurses — all of it reminded him too much of things that could go wrong. But this time, he was smiling before he even reached the room.

Senku's discharge papers were already on the counter when Stanley knocked twice and pushed the door open.

"Stan!" The boy practically bounced, one leg still wrapped in light bandage, face glowing with excitement. "Look! I can almost walk!"

"Almost," Xeno corrected flatly from the corner, where he was busy signing a stack of forms.

Stanley grinned. "Don't encourage him, Doc. He'll be running laps before sundown."

"I can!" Senku insisted.

"No, you can't," Xeno said, but the faint curve of his lips betrayed the warmth behind his words.

Stanley stepped closer and crouched by Senku's bed, ruffling his hair. "You really scared us, you know that?"

Senku puffed out his chest proudly. "But I'm fine now."

Stanley chuckled. "Yeah, you're tougher than most adults I know."

From behind him, Lucas cleared his throat. "We brought you something, little genius."

Senku's eyes widened as Lucas handed over the bright orange gift bag. Inside were model car kits, small wrenches, and a tiny McLaren cap and jacket with his name embroidered on the back.

"No way!" Senku gasped, digging through the pile. "This is awesome!"

The kid's excitement filled the room, and for a while, everything felt normal again — warm, loud, and easy. Even Xeno looked softer, the tension in his shoulders easing as he watched Senku laugh.

Stanley leaned back against the wall, arms crossed, soaking in the sight.

Xeno glanced up. "Something wrong?"

"Nothing," Stanley said too quickly.

Lucas, of course, just smirked. "Nothing at all, Doctor. He's thrilled to see you, that's all."

“Lucas,” Stanley muttered through gritted teeth.

But Xeno only smiled — faint, polite, but his eyes lingered on Stanley for a heartbeat too long. “I appreciate your help with Senku,” he said. “Both of you.”

Lucas tipped his head. “Anytime. Though between us, your kid might steal Stanley’s job someday.”

Senku grinned from the bed. “I’ll drive faster than him!”

Stanley laughed. “You already do, kid.”

A few hours later, after the paperwork was done and Senku was wheeled toward the car, the sun was dipping low — streaks of gold filtering through the hospital’s glass facade.

Lucas had gone ahead to bring the car around, leaving Stanley and Xeno by the exit ramp.

“You didn’t have to come,” Xeno said softly.

Stanley shrugged. “He called me. You really think I’d ignore him?”

“I suppose not.” Xeno’s tone was light, but there was a flicker of something else beneath it — weariness, maybe guilt.

They stood side by side, watching Senku laugh with the nurse. For a moment, neither spoke.

Then Xeno said, almost to himself, “He’s quite fond of you.”

Stanley turned to him. “He’s a good kid.”

“He is.” A pause. “You’re good with him.”

Stanley gave a small laugh. “Guess I just know how to handle stubborn people.”

That earned him a quiet huff from Xeno — not quite laughter, but close. “I can see that.”

When Lucas pulled up, honking lightly, Xeno pushed Senku’s wheelchair toward the car. But before Stanley could follow, Lucas leaned out the window and whispered just loud enough for him to hear:

“So, Dadley. You gonna tell him?”

Stanley glared. “Tell him what?”

“That he’s the only one who makes you forget how to breathe.”

Stanley froze, halfway between protest and confusion, but Lucas just grinned and threw the car in park.

Senku called out, “Stan, come on!”

And just like that, the moment slipped away. Stanley sighed, shaking his head, and went around to help lift Senku into the backseat.

Xeno adjusted the seatbelt carefully, murmuring soft reminders about taking it easy. When he straightened, Stanley caught the faint shadow of fatigue in his face — the kind that came from more than lack of sleep.

“You sure you’re okay?” Stanley asked before he could stop himself.

Xeno blinked. “I’m fine.”

“Liar.”

That earned him a small smirk. “I see Senku’s stubbornness is contagious.”

Stanley grinned. “Told you. I know how to handle stubborn people.”

Xeno shook his head, amused, and climbed into the front passenger seat.

Stanley slid in beside Senku, the kid already half-asleep against his arm, clutching the tiny McLaren cap in his hands.

As Lucas drove them toward the coast, the city lights stretched like fireflies outside the window. Stanley looked at the kid, then at Xeno’s reflection in the glass — calm, tired, and yet steady.

Something in his chest tightened — not pain, not quite fear. Just something.

He didn’t know what it was yet.
But for the first time, he didn’t want to run from it.

Chapter 24: Back on Track

Chapter Notes

> Ill be back tomorrow again hopefully we have electricity already cause the heat is getting to me and my battery is already at 20%. Plus tip is the custody battle shares the same day as the grand prix. PLUS I HATE HAZBIN HOTEL RN LIKE I HAVE THIS HATE/LOVE THING FOR VOX JUST REMEMBER THIS WILL AFFECT THE NEXT FEW CHAPS. EMOTION TEND TO OVERPOWER ME THAN MY BRAIN LOL.

A week passed, and the seaside villa had fallen into a gentle rhythm again.
The mornings were soft — the smell of salt air mixing with the faint aroma of coffee drifting from Xeno's kitchen. Senku had taken to sitting on the porch with his cast propped up on a chair, sketching tiny race cars on scrap paper while Stanley fixed up an old motorcycle he'd found in the garage.

It was quiet. Almost too quiet.

Stanley liked it that way. After years of roaring engines and flashing cameras, peace felt strange but good — like a dream he didn't realize he needed.

Then, one sunny afternoon, the quiet was broken by the unmistakable sound of Lucas's car horn.

"Speak of the devil," Stanley muttered, wiping his hands on a rag. Senku looked up from his sketchbook.

"Is that Uncle Lucas?"

"Yeah," Stanley said, already bracing himself. "And if he's here, it's either bad news or something I can't say no to."

The car rolled to a stop by the gate, and Lucas stepped out — crisp shirt, sunglasses, the same infuriating grin.

"Knock knock," he called, striding up the path. "Hope I'm not interrupting domestic bliss."

Stanley squinted at him. "You're five minutes late. What's the occasion?"

Lucas didn't answer right away. Instead, he handed Stanley a folder — black and orange, stamped with the McLaren logo.

Stanley froze. "What's this?"

“Your comeback,” Lucas said simply. “McLaren wants you back.”

For a moment, the words didn’t register. The wind carried the sound of the waves, and Stanley just stared at the logo — the team, the color, the part of his life he’d almost buried.

“When?” he finally asked.

Lucas’s grin softened into something more serious. “As soon as you’re ready. The next race is in four weeks. They’re giving you the green light to rejoin training.”

Senku gasped. “You’re racing again?!”

Stanley blinked, then smiled faintly at the boy’s excitement. “Looks like it, kid.”

“That’s awesome! Can I come watch? Please?”

Stanley chuckled. “We’ll see.”

Lucas crossed his arms. “You better let him. He’s your lucky charm.”

“Right,” Stanley said, rolling his eyes but unable to hide the smirk tugging at his lips.

Xeno emerged from the kitchen then, wiping his hands on a towel. “I heard voices,” he said, pausing when he saw the folder in Stanley’s hands. “Something important?”

Lucas gave a polite nod. “Mr. Snyder’s been officially re-invited by McLaren. They want him back on the track.”

Xeno’s expression didn’t change much, but Stanley caught the flicker in his eyes — something like surprise, and maybe pride, though it was buried under his usual calm.

“That’s good news,” Xeno said quietly. “Congratulations.”

Stanley met his gaze for a moment longer than necessary. “Thanks.”

Senku, of course, broke the silence with his usual enthusiasm. “Xeno! Can we go? Can we go watch him race?”

Xeno sighed but smiled faintly. “If your leg heals properly and your doctor approves.”

“It will!” Senku said, determined.

Lucas laughed. “Kid’s more confident in him than the sponsors are.”

Stanley nudged him. “Watch it.”

Later, after Lucas left — but not before loudly reminding Stanley to actually start training again instead of flirting with domestic life — the house fell quiet once more.

Stanley sat outside on the porch steps, the McLaren folder still on his lap. Inside it was everything he’d worked for — his old world calling him back, the thrill, the danger, the noise.

But when he looked through the open window and saw Senku giggling at something Xeno said, something in his chest twisted — soft and confusing.

He wanted both worlds.
And he didn’t know which one scared him more.

The race track or the feeling of coming home.

Chapter 25: The Noise Before the Race

Chapter Notes

> If viv is ragebaiting its affecting me like ahhhh. Something in my chest started pouring out like idek why. AH HATE HATE AHHHHHHHHGG'GGGSGSGSJSJDBCBEHSJJWNDKSJDBD

The week before the race came faster than anyone expected.

The villa was quieter now — Xeno's calm voice no longer echoing through the halls, replaced by the sharp tones of legal calls and paperwork from afar. He was neck-deep in the custody battle, shuttling between hearings and conferences. Every night, Stanley would catch a glimpse of him through a video call with Senku, his expression tired but steady, that same composed man holding it all together for the kid.

So, for the meantime, Senku stayed with the crew. Lucas took the unofficial role of babysitter, though everyone on the team ended up pitching in.

The track had become a second home for Senku — and for Stanley, that was both comforting and nerve-wracking. The kid had that boundless curiosity that made mechanics melt and engineers laugh. He'd run around the garage asking a hundred questions a minute, tiny notebook in hand, sketching every engine part like a young prodigy.

Lucas joked, "At this rate, the kid's gonna replace you as driver and engineer, Stan."

Stanley smirked. "Then at least I'll have a decent successor."

Still, every time he saw Senku adjusting his crutches to peek under a car or sneaking extra energy bars from Lucas's bag, there was that sharp, silent tug in Stanley's chest — the kind he didn't know how to name yet.

By midweek, the interviews started rolling in.

Microphones. Cameras. Flashes.

All the things Stanley used to shrug off now felt heavier. The journalists were everywhere, their questions sharper than ever:

"Stanley Snyder, what made you come back after four months of silence?"
"Rumor has it, you've been training off the grid — any truth to that?"
"What's different about you this season?"

He'd always been good at brushing off reporters, but now their voices grated more than usual. His answers came out clipped, practiced — the kind of cold professionalism Lucas said sounded "charmingly dangerous."

But when one interviewer asked, "Was there something personal that brought you back?", he froze for half a second too long.

Senku was watching from the pit lane, swinging his legs on a stool.
Lucas caught the pause, quickly cutting in. "Mr. Snyder's focus is on racing, not rumors," he said smoothly.

The cameras moved on, but Stanley's head stayed down.

Later that night, the track was empty — just the low hum of the wind and the smell of fuel. Stanley sat on the hood of his car, helmet beside him, staring at the floodlights flickering across the asphalt.

He'd missed this — the speed, the sound, the danger. But it wasn't the same anymore. He wasn't the same.

He heard small footsteps and looked over to see Senku limping toward him, wrapped in a jacket far too big for him.

"Lucas said you were still here," Senku said, climbing up beside him. "You always stay late now."

"Just… thinking," Stanley muttered.

Senku tilted his head. "About the race?"

"Yeah," he said softly, then smirked a little. "And about your dad yelling at me if you get grease on your cast again."

Senku laughed, but it faded quickly. "He's really busy, huh?"

"Yeah," Stanley said. "He's fighting for you, you know that."

"I know." The kid's voice was small. "But I still miss him."

Stanley looked away. "You'll see him soon, genius. He's not giving up."

Senku nodded, silent for a while, before whispering, "Are you gonna leave again after the race?"

Stanley froze. The question hit harder than he expected.

"I don't know yet," he said honestly. "But wherever I go, I'll visit, yeah? You'll get tired of seeing me."

Senku smiled faintly. "Promise?"

Stanley looked down at him — this stubborn, brilliant kid who somehow managed to wedge himself right between the cracks of his old, armored life.

“Promise.”

Chapter 26: The Start of the Storm

Chapter Notes

> So yeah because of my 5 day absence im gonna be feeding y'all the things i wrote the last five days ago 😋😋😋😋😋😋

The morning of the race felt like electricity. The sky above the track was a hard, sharp blue — the kind that promised heat, speed, and maybe a little chaos.

Stanley stood at the edge of the pit lane, the McLaren logo gleaming on his race suit, his helmet tucked under his arm. Around him, engines growled to life like a pack of beasts waiting for release. Mechanics scrambled in perfect rhythm, the scent of burning rubber and gasoline thick in the air. Cameras clicked, fans roared, and the announcers' voices echoed across the stands.

It was loud. Overwhelming. Familiar.
And for the first time in months, it felt right.

He hadn't felt this alive since before the crash — before the noise had turned into pain, before the world reminded him that even gods on tracks can bleed.

Now he was back. The prodigal son of McLaren. The one who crashed and rose again.

He slipped the helmet on, the world muting instantly. His breathing steadied, his vision tunneled, his heartbeat synced to the countdown. The adrenaline hit like old wine — rich, intoxicating, dangerous.

Then, through the tinted visor, he caught sight of movement near the stands.

A flash of pale green hair.
Senku.

The kid was sitting in the VIP section, small frame perched between Lucas and two team members. He was waving a little McLaren flag like his arm would fall off, grinning wide despite the cast still visible around his leg.

Stanley couldn't hear him, but he didn't need to. He could imagine it.
"Go, Stanley!"

He felt his chest tighten — not with nerves, but something warmer, almost too soft for the world he lived in.

For once, he wanted to show off. Not for fame. Not for sponsors.
For the kid who believed in him.

And for the man who wasn't there.

Xeno couldn't come — Lucas had told him the night before that the final custody hearing was today. Xeno would arrive after, maybe in time to see the last few laps.

Stanley remembered the last message Xeno sent him before signing off at midnight:

"Win safely. Senku would want to brag about it later."

The words stuck in his head, quiet but heavy.

The lights above the track began their count.

Red.
Red.
Red.
Green.

And just like that — the world exploded.

Stanley launched forward, the roar of his engine devouring the sound of the crowd. The car hugged the asphalt, precise and hungry, slicing through corners like it remembered every scar from before. His hands moved on instinct, seamless, cold, perfect.

By the third lap, he'd already taken the lead. The crowd went insane, chanting his name, commentators calling it a miracle comeback.

But he barely heard them. His focus narrowed to the track, the vibration through the wheel, the data flashing across his HUD. Every sense sharpened, every motion calculated. It was the old Stanley — reckless precision, ruthless speed.

Except now, his mind flickered between flashes — Senku's grin. Xeno's calm voice. The crash. The fire. The second chance.

He was driving not just to prove he was still the best.
He was driving to prove he'd changed.

By lap 40, Lucas's voice came through the comms.

"You're flying, Snyder. Keep this pace and you'll be untouchable."

Stanley smirked beneath his helmet. "Wouldn't want to make it too easy."

The pit crew laughed through the line. Even Lucas's voice lightened.

And then, as he zoomed through the straight, he glanced at the big screen above the track — a live camera feed of the VIP stands.

Senku was still waving.

Stanley barked a laugh — short, rough, real.

Lap 55. He was still in the lead. The tires were holding. The engine purred like a living thing. Everything was in sync.

It felt like the world wasn't against him.

He thought about what he'd say to Xeno later — about proving that this wasn't another reckless gamble. That he could be the man both of them could rely on — Senku's wild hero, Xeno's unwanted but persistent chaos.

For now, though, he just drove. Fast. Free.
The world around him blurred into color and heat.

He was Stanley Snyder — still the best, still untouchable.
And he was about to win again.

Chapter 27: The victory

The last few laps were supposed to be simple — smooth, fast, controlled.
But Stanley had been doing this long enough to know when something felt off.

The radio chatter changed.

Lucas's voice, usually steady, had gone quiet for a beat too long before saying, "You're doing good, Stan. Keep it tight."
And the mechanics — the same ones who cheered every lap — weren't whooping in the background anymore. It was just static, soft murmurs, someone muttering something he couldn't catch.

He frowned beneath his helmet but didn't break focus. The tires were still gripping fine, the engine's rhythm steady as a heartbeat. But the silence from the pit wall crawled under his skin.

"Lucas," he said through the comms. "Talk to me. What's wrong?"

A pause. Then Lucas's voice returned, sharp and practiced.
"Nothing. Just keep your line, Snyder. Final two laps."

That tone —clipped, careful—told him everything wasn't fine.
Still, there was no time to think.

Final lap.

Stanley could almost taste the air. Every nerve buzzed with adrenaline, the car shaking slightly as he pushed through the last corner. The world outside the cockpit was a smear of color — lights, banners, the blur of the crowd.

He didn't even blink as he crossed the finish line.

The roar that followed hit like a wave — deafening, wild, ecstatic.

First place.

McLaren's banner waved high. The pit crew erupted, mechanics throwing their headsets, hugging each other, shouting his name.

Stanley slowed the car, the engine humming as if proud. For a second, the world was golden again — the noise, the triumph, the flash of photographers as he took the victory lap.

He parked the car, climbed out, and lifted his helmet high — the crowd roared louder.
Cameras went off in rapid fire.

For a fleeting moment, he let himself feel it.

He was back.

All those months in exile, the accident, the endless silence — they didn't matter now. He'd proven everyone wrong. He wasn't broken. He wasn't reckless. He was still the best.

He turned to the stands automatically, ready to point, ready to grin at the kid who had cheered the loudest every time he drove.

But the VIP section — the one where Senku had been waving that McLaren flag earlier — was empty.

His chest tightened.

He scanned the crowd again. Maybe the kid just moved seats, maybe Lucas made him sit somewhere safer.
He turned to his comms.
"Hey, Lucas. Where's the kid? I don't see him."

Lucas didn't respond right away. The noise of celebration filled the channel, but Lucas's voice was a low murmur behind it.

"Senku?, yeah. He just went to the restroom before the last lap. Don't worry, he's fine. Probably missed the finish."

Stanley exhaled, forcing a grin as reporters crowded him. "Yeah? Tell him he missed one hell of a show."

The interviews started instantly.

Microphones shoved in his face, the bright sun reflecting off his visor, the questions flying fast.

"Stanley Snyder, welcome back — how does it feel to win after everything that happened last season?"
"You've silenced every critic out there! What's your secret this time?"
"Do you think this race marks a new era for McLaren?"

He answered on autopilot — sharp, confident, the way the sponsors loved it.
"It feels damn good," he said with that trademark grin. "McLaren's family, and I never stopped believing in us. This win's for the team."

More flashes. More questions. Someone shouted something about "redemption," another about "destiny."

Lucas eventually slipped through the chaos, clapping him on the shoulder, camera flashes bouncing off both of them.

"Welcome back, champ," Lucas said with that familiar half-smile.

Stanley grinned, though the unease from earlier still buzzed faintly under his skin. “Where’s Senku now? Probably crying that he missed it.”

Lucas’s smile didn’t falter, but his eyes flickered briefly.
“He’ll be fine, Stanley. He’ll see the replay a hundred times, I bet.”

Stanley laughed. “Yeah. Kid’s probably memorizing my laps already.”

But the feeling wouldn’t leave. Something about Lucas’s tone —careful, deliberate —made his stomach twist.

He brushed it off as paranoia. The win was still fresh, the cheers still loud. The flash of his own reflection in the trophy gleamed —sharp and perfect.

He deserved this moment.

And yet, as he lifted the trophy for the cameras, one thought refused to leave his mind.

Why did the team go quiet before the final lap?
And why wasn’t Senku there to see him win?

Chapter 28: The Celebration

Chapter Notes

> Is it bad if i upload a lot today abd yesterday. Im pouring everything i've written from last 5 days ago and today.

The champagne sprayed high into the night.
The lights around the paddock shimmered like stars, bouncing off the sea of McLaren orange.

Everyone was laughing — loud, uninhibited, tipsy with victory. Music blasted from portable speakers, and the whole McLaren crew danced with the reckless joy of people who hadn't slept in days. The air smelled of alcohol, sweat, and expensive fuel.

Stanley Snyder was the man of the hour again — the comeback king, the racer who defied statistics. Everyone wanted a picture with him. A handshake. A toast. A quote they could brag about later.

He smiled, grinned, and toasted when they handed him a glass, even though the liquid burned more bitter than sweet tonight.

It should've felt right. This was what he missed — the roar, the adoration, the celebration. But something was off.

Something had been off since the finish line.

Because his team — the small, tight-knit group that handled his car, his data, his every pit stop — wasn't celebrating like everyone else. They were there, sure. Smiling. Laughing when people looked. But their smiles didn't quite reach their eyes.

And Lucas — Lucas, who usually carried the whole party's energy — sat in the corner of the lounge, half-drunk, murmuring into his phone, his hand pressed against his temple like the sound around him was too much.

Stanley walked through the crowd, his jacket half-open, his medal hanging loosely around his neck. Someone tried to drag him into another photo, but he waved them off.

He approached Lucas. "Hey. Manager man. Why do you look like your dog just died? We won."

Lucas blinked up, startled, then forced a grin. "Stanley. Hell of a race, huh? You're officially back."

"Yeah," Stanley said. "And yet you look like you attended a funeral."

Lucas chuckled dryly, avoiding his eyes. “Just tired. Haven’t stopped since dawn.”

Stanley eyed him — the unease deepening. “You talked to Xeno? I’ve been calling both of them. They’re not picking up. Figured maybe they’re throwing me a surprise party at the beach house or something.”

Lucas’s expression flickered — so fast that if Stanley hadn’t been watching closely, he would’ve missed it.

“A surprise party, huh?” Lucas muttered, setting his drink down. “That’d be nice.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing,” Lucas said quickly, rising from his seat. “You should go rest. You’ll be dead tired tomorrow.”

But before Stanley could reply, a loud cheer from across the lounge pulled attention. Some McLaren execs were clinking glasses, shouting his name.
“Stanley! Speech! Speech!”

He was dragged toward the center of the room again.

For the next ten minutes, he gave the usual — charming words, a confident grin, the toast of the champion. Everyone cheered, the air thick with pride and victory.

But through it all, he kept glancing at his phone.
Still no messages. No calls. No replies.

Weird, he thought. Xeno always answers, even if he’s busy.
And Senku? That kid texted faster than lightning.

The unease grew, stretching like a taut wire inside his chest.

An hour later, the party began to thin out. People left in pairs or trios, laughing, promising hangovers and breakfast.

Stanley slipped out of the main hall, trophy still in hand, into the quieter part of the building — the one where the engineers and his team usually gathered privately after races.

He pushed the door open.

The laughter stopped.

Inside, his core team — the pit crew, data engineers, and Lucas — sat around a low table. No music. Just the hum of an air conditioner and the faint static of a muted TV showing race highlights.

No one noticed him at first. They were too busy talking.

He was about to announce himself with some sarcastic comment, but then he froze when he heard his own name.

"…Stanley must be over the moon," one of the engineers said quietly. "He doesn't know yet, does he?"

Lucas sighed, rubbing his temples. "No. Not yet. Let him have tonight. He earned it."

There was a long silence before someone else spoke, voice low.
"It's… just messed up, you know? Senku's just a kid. And Xeno—"

"Yeah," another murmured. "How frustrating must it be? To fight for months, for everything, only for it to end today of all days."

Stanley felt his throat tighten. His fingers went numb.

End?

He stepped forward quietly, the wood creaking under his boots. No one noticed yet.

Lucas spoke again, his tone weary. "How ironic," he said softly, words heavy like stones.
"Stanley wins his match… and Xeno doesn't."

The silence that followed was deafening.

Stanley's hand trembled. His pulse pounded in his ears.

"…What did you just say?"

Every head turned. Lucas froze mid-sentence. The air in the room went still.

Stanley's voice dropped low — not angry, not yet, just trembling. "What did you mean, Lucas? Xeno didn't win? What the hell happened?"

No one answered. Not at first.

Then Lucas exhaled shakily, shoulders slumping.
"Stan—"

"Say it."

Lucas's eyes met his, full of something between exhaustion and pity.
"The custody hearing… it didn't go in his favor."

Stanley's stomach twisted violently.

Lucas went on quietly. "Senku's mother won. The mother's taking the boy."

The words hit harder than any crash, any impact, any wall of flame.
The air around Stanley seemed to vanish, replaced by that old, hollow roar in his ears — the sound of an engine dying, the silence after chaos.

He stood there, unable to breathe, the trophy still clutched in his hand.

Around him, no one spoke. No one moved.

The victory lights outside still glittered through the window, bright and mocking.

He'd won the race.
And Xeno… had lost everything.

Chapter 29: The Eclipse

Chapter Notes

I HAVE NEVER FELT FRUSTRATED MY WHOLE LIFE EXCEPT FOR 2 THINGS ONE IS WHEN I HAVE STOPPED READING LOVE IN THE BRAIN WHERE BEE MISUNDERSTOOD LEVI (I GOT OVER IT LIKE AFTER 3 WEEKS BUT MY HATRED ON THAT SCENE AGAINST LEVI WAS IMMENSE I NEEDED TO STOP READING IT). SECOND, THE SUMMER I TURNED PRETTY, (SEASON 3 REALLY MESS ME UP I CRY EVERY WEDNESDAY FOR THAT FUCK UGHHH) NOW ADDING TO IT IS HAZBIN HOTEL GODDAMN I JUST SAW A SPOILER ON TIKTOK IM CRYINT RIGHT NOW HOPING ITS NOT TRUE MY CHEST HURTS LIKE PHYSICALLY HURTS. I MOURN(NO ONE DIES) MY FAVOURITE CHARACTERS LIKE THEY ARE A LOVER WHO DIED. So uploading this and another one, the next chapter would be on monday.

Stanley didn't believe it.
He couldn't.

He left the stunned faces of his team behind without a word, walking straight through the dim hallway, the trophy still in his hand. His pulse thudded in his ears like a drumbeat, drowning out every muffled cheer outside.

When he reached his suite, he slammed the door shut and locked it. The laughter, the music, the noise of celebration—all of it died behind the thick hotel walls.

He threw the trophy onto the couch and pressed his palms into his face. His breaths came fast, uneven, the victory champagne still burning on his tongue like acid.

They're wrong. They have to be wrong.

He grabbed his phone again and hit Xeno's contact.
One ring. Two. Three.
Voicemail.

He tried again.
Still nothing.

Then he tried Senku's number.
Disconnected.

"Damn it…" he muttered, pacing the carpeted floor.

He couldn’t leave—not yet. The building was sealed with press and paparazzi waiting at every corner. Outside, he could already hear the echo of cameras and fans shouting his name, chanting his win.

Stanley Snyder! McLaren’s comeback hero!

If he stepped out now, he’d be swallowed whole by it—just another image, another headline.

But inside, he was breaking.

He turned on the TV, desperate for something, anything that wasn’t the silence in his head. Every channel was broadcasting his win, his grin, his interview soundbites.
But when he flipped again, he froze.

The headline on a muted news feed read:

“NASA Welcomes Back Top Scientist Xeno Wingfield After Year and a half Long Hiatus.”

Stanley blinked.

The screen cut to footage of Xeno—clean-shaven, in a crisp black suit, surrounded by flashes of cameras. His silver-blond hair gleamed under the lights, his posture as composed as ever, though there was a hollowness in his eyes that cameras wouldn’t catch unless they knew him.

The reporter’s voice cut through the static.

“After nearly a year and four months of absence, Xeno Wingfield, one of NASA’s most esteemed researchers, has officially returned to the agency. Known for his contributions to deep-space propulsion and bio-sustainability studies, Wingfield’s return coincides with an event the press has dubbed ‘The Eclipse’ — two fallen figures in their fields, both making comebacks on the same day.”

Stanley’s stomach dropped.

Two comebacks. Two people who fell.

Him.
And Xeno.

The camera panned closer to Xeno’s face. His expression was calm, unreadable. There was no joy, no spark—just quiet exhaustion dressed in professionalism. He was surrounded by NASA executives shaking his hand, congratulating him, while the reporter continued:

“Today marks the so-called Eclipse: two paths crossing unseen — one of victory, one of loss, both returning from their respective darkness. Dr. Wingfield declined to answer personal questions, focusing instead on the importance of rebuilding his work and team after a long hiatus.”

Stanley sank onto the edge of his bed, staring blankly at the screen.

He went back.
He actually went back.

It made sense now—the quiet in the comms, the unease in the team, Lucas's silence.

Xeno lost the custody battle.
And the same day the court took Senku away… NASA took Xeno back.

Stanley let out a broken laugh, bitter and disbelieving.
"What the hell kind of trade is that, huh?" he muttered, gripping his hair. "He loses his kid and they just—what—hand him a lab coat and a press conference?"

He shut his eyes and leaned back against the wall.
Every victory highlight on TV blurred into noise. The headlines meant nothing. The champagne on his shirt smelled like rot.

All he could see was Xeno in that black suit, surrounded by people who didn't know that the only thing he wanted back wasn't a career—it was Senku.

The irony burned in Stanley's chest.
Two men, clawing their way back from ruin.
One to the track.
One to the stars.

And both of them standing in the same light.
The Eclipse.

He laughed again, hollow and tired, until the sound broke halfway through.

He sank further into the bed, staring at the dark window that overlooked the track.
Somewhere out there, cameras were flashing, the world was celebrating, the engines were cooling after a perfect race.

But all he could feel was the weight of the silence that followed.

He had never hated winning this much before.

Chapter 30: The Shore

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

That night, Stanley couldn't breathe.

The applause, the cameras, the reporters—all of it pressed against his chest like a weight he couldn't shake off. He tore off the race suit halfway down the hallway, ignoring Lucas calling after him. Someone shouted about the afterparty, another about the press conference, but Stanley just kept walking, then running.

Through the parking lot.
Through the swarm of fans.
Through the flash of cameras that begged for his name.

He shoved past security and ducked behind the trucks until the noise faded into a blur. His pulse thundered in his ears, and before he knew it, he was driving—fast, directionless, headlights cutting through the dark highway like claws.

He didn't know where he was going until the coastline appeared.
The villa.

The house was dark when he arrived. The same house where laughter used to spill from the kitchen. Where Senku's drawings still clung to the fridge, curling at the corners. Where Xeno used to stand in that black polo shirt, hair slicked back, reading cases while the ocean whispered outside.

But now, the silence was thick. The air felt wrong.

"Xeno?" Stanley called, stepping through the door. His voice echoed back. No reply.

He pulled out his phone again and hit call.
One ring. Two. Three.
Voicemail.

He called again.
Still nothing.

He clenched the phone tighter, his knuckles white. Then he called Lucas.

"Lucas—where's Xeno?" Stanley's voice cracked halfway through.

A pause. Then Lucas sighed.
"I don't know, Stan. He—he just disappeared after the hearing. Didn't even go home. Look, man, I think you should leave this one alone tonight. It's… bad."

But Stanley didn't hang up right away. He looked out the window, to where the moonlight struck the shore.

Something in him knew.

He left the phone on the counter and walked outside, his shoes crunching against the gravel until the sand softened underfoot. The ocean stretched before him, calm and endless. And there—by the waterline, just where Senku used to sit when he was sad—stood Xeno.

His hair was loose, blowing with the wind. His coat hung limp from his shoulders, and his eyes—when he turned—were red. Not from the cold, but from crying.

Stanley froze. In all the years he'd known Xeno Wingfield—the unshakable NASA scientist, the man with every answer—he had never seen him like this.

"Xeno…" he said softly, stepping closer. "What happened?"

For a moment, there was only the sound of the waves between them.

Then Xeno exhaled, a sound somewhere between a laugh and a tremor.
"It's over."

Stanley frowned. "What do you mean—"

"The case," Xeno said quietly, his voice brittle. "The custody battle. I lost."

Stanley's chest tightened. "What? Why—how?"

Xeno didn't look at him. He just stared out at the black horizon, hands trembling slightly.

"They found out," he whispered. "About Senku's leg. The injury. Someone reported that he got it on a racetrack. Under my watch. They called it negligence."

Stanley's breath hitched.

"The court decided I wasn't fit to take care of him," Xeno continued. "They said I prioritized work and… 'dangerous company.' They gave custody to his mother."

Silence.

The waves rolled against the shore, cold and steady.

"New York," Xeno added, barely audible. "She's taking him there tomorrow."

Stanley took a step back, his heartbeat cracking in his ears. His throat felt dry, his voice a whisper.
"So… Senku's gone?"

Xeno finally turned to him. His eyes glistened, hollow but sharp.
"Yes."

For a long time, Stanley couldn't speak. He just stood there, staring at him—at the man who once never bent, now broken by something no court could ever fix.

The weight of it sank into him slowly, heavy and sharp. The race. The injury. The way Senku begged not to tell.
It all connected.

His fault.

Every single thing.

Stanley pressed a hand to his face, the world spinning. "I—I was the one who took him to the track. I let him climb that car. I—"

Xeno didn't interrupt. He just looked at him, quiet. Too tired even to be angry.

Stanley's voice cracked. "You lost him because of me."

For a moment, Xeno's lips parted, like he wanted to say something—no, it's not your fault, maybe, or it doesn't matter anymore.
But nothing came out.

He just turned his eyes back to the sea. "He's with his mother now. That's what matters."

Stanley's chest burned. He wanted to reach out, to touch his shoulder, to say something—anything—but the words wouldn't form.

The waves kept crashing, steady and cruel.

Behind them, the villa stood dark.
Before them, the sea stretched endlessly, swallowing the moonlight whole.

And between them, the silence said everything words couldn't.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the burst out on the previous chapter im just frustrated and i have no one to talk to over that here at home(of course no one at home would be glad to know i watch gay demons and angels—my parents are religious) Ahh hehe thanks love you ALL

Chapter 31: The House of What Remains

For a long time, neither of them spoke. Only the sea did.

Stanley stood there, hands trembling, every word that came out of Xeno still echoing like the crash of his own engine years ago. Negligence. Custody lost. Senku gone.

He couldn't stop shaking. His jaw locked as he turned toward Xeno again, words spilling like broken glass.
"I took him there. It was me. If I hadn't—if I didn't—"

"Stanley," Xeno said quietly, his voice calm but raw.

He didn't stop. "He was just a kid. I should've been careful! You lost him because of me, Xeno! I—"

"Stanley."

It wasn't loud, but it was enough to stop him cold. The kind of tone that didn't ask—it commanded stillness.

Xeno's eyes softened. "It wasn't your fault."

Stanley blinked, stunned. "What—"

"He's a child," Xeno continued, his voice steady though his hands trembled slightly.
"Children get hurt. They fall, they make mistakes, and we—" he swallowed hard— "we can't control everything. Not always. The court didn't see that. They only saw headlines,' NASA's Negligent Guardian. They made a story out of me."

Xeno's lips curved into something that might've been a smile once, now only half-formed and weary.
"I should've known better than to fight a narrative like that."

Stanley clenched his fists. "You still lost him because of me."

Xeno's gaze fell to the sand, the wind brushing his pale hair into his face. "Maybe," he said softly. "But I don't blame you."

It was that tone—the one Xeno used in court when he was telling a witness they weren't alone in the mess. It broke something in Stanley.

He wanted to argue, to scream, to confess that he'd trade every trophy, every lap, every damn medal just to undo that day—but he couldn't.
The words would only make it worse.

So he did the only thing he could. He walked up and stood beside Xeno, close enough that their shoulders almost brushed, and together they stared at the ocean until the tide reached

their shoes.

Xeno finally exhaled, like he'd been holding his breath for days. "Come on," he murmured, voice hoarse. "It's cold. Let's go home."

Stanley didn't move at first, still trying to catch up to the word. Home.

Xeno turned and started walking back toward the villa. His steps were slow, unsteady, as if every part of him had been drained dry. Stanley followed, quiet.

The house was the same, but it felt hollow now—Senku's laughter replaced by the distant hum of the refrigerator and the faint crash of waves outside.

Stanley noticed his own villa down the road, dark and locked. Lucas had closed it weeks ago, moving out the last of Stanley's belongings when the training season started. This place—Xeno's house—was the only light left on the coast.

Inside, Xeno tossed his keys onto the counter and slumped onto the couch. He didn't even bother to take off his coat. Stanley stood awkwardly for a moment before taking a seat across from him.

"Do you want me to… go?" Stanley asked quietly.

Xeno shook his head, eyes half-closed. "No. Stay. The villa's closed, isn't it?"

Stanley nodded.

"Then you stay here," Xeno said simply. "You shouldn't drive back anyway."

That was that. No dramatics, no speeches. Just quiet understanding.

Stanley exhaled and leaned back into the couch. For the first time in years, he didn't want to think about races, or fame, or anything beyond this dimly lit room.

After a while, Xeno stood and went to the kitchen. The faint clink of glass followed, then the low pour of liquid. He returned with two glasses of whiskey and handed one to Stanley.

"To your win," Xeno murmured, lifting his glass just slightly.

Stanley hesitated, then lifted his too. "To Senku."

They drank in silence.

Outside, the ocean rolled on endlessly, swallowing the sound of their grief.

Later that night, Stanley dozed off on the couch, his head tilted back. Xeno sat nearby, half awake, half dazed. He looked at the man who'd once been the storm in his peaceful life, now sitting quietly, undone by the same pain he carried.

He sighed, stood up, and fetched a blanket. Carefully, he draped it over Stanley's shoulders, watching him stir slightly before settling again.

Xeno looked at him and smiled faintly, whispering almost to himself,
"Stubborn fool. You'll drive me insane before you even try to fix yourself."

Then he turned off the light, leaving only the ocean's glow from the window—and for the first time in days, he allowed himself to rest.

Chapter 32: The Words That Shouldn't Have Been Said

Chapter Notes

> Ohhh yeah i said monday but i saw my schedule shhh a lot of thing going around so yeahhhh. Plus have you all seen the fics of clump funny as hell

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The morning came quietly—too quietly. The sea was calm, the sky gray, and the villa smelled faintly of salt and stale whiskey. Stanley had barely slept. Every time he closed his eyes, all he could see was Senku's smile fading behind airport glass, Xeno's red-rimmed eyes under the night sky, and the cold word custody replaying like a bad song.

He found Xeno in the kitchen, half-dressed in a clean shirt and still wearing that air of exhaustion he carried like a second skin. The coffee machine hissed softly between them.

"Morning," Stanley muttered, scratching his neck.

"Morning," Xeno replied without looking up. His voice was polite but clipped—tired in a way that said he didn't want to think, much less talk.

Stanley leaned against the counter, watching the steam rise from Xeno's mug. "So… what happens now?"

Xeno took a sip. "Now? I go to NASA next week, start reorientation."

Stanley frowned. "I mean about Senku."

Xeno's hand paused midair. The silence that followed was cold and fragile.

"Senku's with his mother now," Xeno said finally, setting the mug down. "That's what happens."

Stanley crossed his arms. "But can't you reappeal or something? I mean, fight back? They can't just take him after one ruling."

"It's not that simple," Xeno said, tone steady but sharp. "There's evidence, Stanley. Reports. Injury photos. Statements from the track staff—"

"He broke a leg! Kids break bones all the time!" Stanley snapped. "That doesn't make you a bad guardian!"

"It makes me a negligent one on paper," Xeno cut in, eyes narrowing. "And in court, paper wins."

Stanley pushed off the counter, pacing. “You can’t just—just accept this! Don’t you care that he’s with some woman who didn’t even want him until now?”

“I care,” Xeno said evenly. “But caring doesn’t win cases. It just hurts longer.”

Stanley turned toward him, voice rising. “Then fight anyway!”

That made Xeno’s calm crack. He slammed his mug down on the counter, the sound splitting through the quiet.

“Why?” he demanded. “Why are you so concerned?”

Stanley blinked, stunned.

Xeno stepped closer, frustration finally visible in the tremor of his voice. “Why does it matter so much to you where Senku ends up? He’s not your responsibility. He’s not your son. You’re —”

He hesitated, the words like acid on his tongue.
“—you’re just a neighbor who used to play with him.”

The words hit harder than either of them expected.

Stanley felt it—like the sudden drop on a high-speed curve, the moment before the car loses traction. His jaw tightened.

“Just a neighbor,” he repeated quietly, the words tasting wrong.

Xeno rubbed his forehead, as if realizing what he’d just said. “Stanley, I didn’t mean—”

But Stanley’s eyes were fixed on him now, cold and unreadable.

“Yeah,” he said, forcing a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “Just a neighbor who used to play with him.”

The silence that followed was heavy, the kind that swallowed everything around it.

Stanley turned away, heading for the door. His hand hovered over the handle before he said, almost under his breath,

“I liked you, you know.”

Xeno froze.

Stanley kept going, voice quiet but steady now.
“I liked Senku. I liked the peace here. I liked not being Stanley Snyder, the racer, or the idiot who can’t live up to his family’s name. I liked you because you didn’t look at me like that.”

He finally turned his head, eyes glinting with something between anger and pain.
“So don’t tell me I was just some neighbor. Not when you let me stay. Not when you let me

care.”

Xeno’s lips parted, but no sound came out.

Stanley exhaled shakily, hand tightening on the doorknob. “You can go back to NASA and pretend none of this happened. That’s fine. But don’t you dare tell me I don’t care, Xeno. Because I do. Too much.”

And with that, he opened the door and left.

The echo of it closing lingered long after he was gone.

Xeno stood there, motionless, staring at the spot where Stanley had been. His chest ached in a way equations couldn’t explain. He pressed a hand to it, but the pressure didn’t help.

For the first time since Senku’s custody ruling, he wanted to cry again. But no tears came—just the faint whisper of the ocean outside, the only witness to what they’d both just broken.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah haha sorry i know this was the one i posted on tiktom making you all think they confessed to each other but not hahahaha gotchu all clickbaited so hard.

Chapter 33: The Quiet Conspirator

Chapter Notes

Yum yum yum

The office was wrapped in silence—polished, suffocating silence.
Sunlight fell in sharp lines across the black marble desk, catching the edge of a silver pen and a spread of papers stamped with two names:

Xeno Wingfield.
Senku Ishigami.

Lucas sat stiffly across from the woman behind the desk. Even now, years of managing public relations, negotiations, and sponsors hadn't prepared him for her.

She didn't even look up when she spoke. "You look pale, Lucas. That doesn't suit you."

Lucas swallowed. "I'm not here for pleasantries, Mrs. Snyder."

Finally, she looked up.
Sharp eyes. Perfect posture. The same calm arrogance Stanley wore on race day—except colder. More deliberate.

"Then you must be here to lecture me, as you usually do," she said, voice smooth. "Go on, then. Tell me how heartless I am for worrying about my son."

Lucas's jaw tightened. "You call this worrying?" He gestured toward the documents. "Dragging an innocent man into a custody case? Having his kid taken away because of an accident you spun into negligence? That's not worry, that's manipulation."

Mrs. Snyder tilted her head slightly, as though considering his accusation like a wine note. "Manipulation is such a vulgar word. I prefer intervention. Plus didn't you partake in this also —reporting the incident to me"

Lucas rose from his chair. "You can't just—"

"I can," she interrupted, her voice like a blade slipping through glass. "And I will. Because someone has to clean up the mess my son insists on creating."

Her tone softened just slightly. "You've known him long enough, Lucas. You've seen how he lives—reckless, detached, with no plan beyond the next circuit. You said it yourself: he's twenty-eight. He's been racing since twenty-two. At what point do we stop calling it passion and start calling it running away?"

Lucas froze. His chest ached at how easily she said it—like it was a fact carved into stone.

She stood and walked to the window, her silhouette framed by the city skyline. “I don’t want to harm him. God knows I love that boy more than anything. But I’m tired of watching him throw his life into fire for… what? Applause?”

Her hand hovered over the papers.
“These—” she tapped the files bearing Xeno’s name “—were necessary. Xeno Wingfield was a variable I couldn’t control. That man pulled my son into his world of quiet failure, and the child, Senku, tied them together like an anchor. So I cut the chain.”

Lucas’s throat went dry. “You had no right.”

“I have every right.” She turned, her gaze slicing through him. “I am his mother.”

For a moment, neither of them spoke. The only sound was the low hum of the air conditioner.

Lucas took a step forward. “Then tell me why you dragged me into this. Why I’m sitting here instead of walking out that door and calling Stanley myself.”

Mrs. Snyder smiled faintly. “Because, Lucas… you already did something for me once.”

His stomach dropped. “What?”

Her voice lowered, almost tender. “You remember the accident, don’t you? The blown tires, the crash, the miracle that left my son with only minor injuries?”

Lucas’s breath caught. “You… you told me to—”

“I told you to keep him alive,” she said, finishing the sentence for him. “And you did. You sabotaged just enough for him to wake up without dying. You gave me my son back.”

Lucas’s hands shook. “You used me. You said it was for a tire test! That it would keep him off the track for a few months—”

“And it worked.” Her eyes gleamed, satisfied. “He rested. He healed. You even found him a place to recover. That coast house, wasn’t it? Where he met that NASA dropout.”

Lucas’s jaw clenched. “You planned that too?”

“No.” She paused, smiling faintly. “But I wasn’t displeased when it happened. Xeno Wingfield was harmless—until he wasn’t. Until that boy started calling my son Dadley.”

Lucas’s breath came shallow. “You’re saying—”

“I’m saying,” she interrupted, “that Stanley is soft where he shouldn’t be. You want him to settle down? So do I. But he needs to do it right. Without distractions. Without a scandal. Without guilt.”

She leaned closer, her perfume sharp and clean. “He cannot build a life around other people’s mistakes. So I erased them for him.”

Lucas’s stomach turned. He wanted to throw the papers at her, to shout that she’d gone too far—but he didn’t. Because in the coldest, most frightening way, she wasn’t wrong.

He had thought the same thing once. That Stanley needed to stop. To live instead of just drive.

“Trust me with this, Lucas,” she said softly, almost pleading now. “I don’t want to harm him. I only want him to find peace. You said so yourself—he’s tired. You see it too. Help me give him something that lasts.”

Lucas looked at the papers again—the custody filings, the NASA reinstatement documents, the neatly printed signatures. It was all too perfect, too arranged.

And under it all, a familiar signature: his own. From the accident report. The one that had kept Stanley from dying.

He felt sick.

“God help you,” he whispered, voice breaking. “If he finds out.”

Mrs. Snyder only smiled and sat back down, folding her hands gracefully. “He won’t. You’ve always been so good at keeping him focused, Lucas. Let’s keep it that way.”

Lucas turned to leave, but she added, her tone deceptively gentle,
“Oh, and Lucas?”

He froze in the doorway.

“Do remind my son,” she said, “that even the fastest man on the track can’t outrun what’s been set for him.”

Chapter 34: The neighbor

Chapter Notes

> Im tired like my body is tired from the excess standig we did for lining up in lines for grad requirements damn and my eyes been sleepy but i cant sleep like ugh

The world outside kept moving, but Stanley couldn't.

It had been a week since Xeno told him those words — "You're just a neighbor who used to play with him."
They rang in his head every time he tried to sleep, every time he stared at the empty couch where Senku used to sit playing with model cars.

Now, his penthouse felt like a showroom — polished, silent, lifeless.
Even the city lights outside couldn't fill the dark weight inside him.

He hadn't gone back to the villa. Couldn't.
That house had laughter once.
Now, it was just a reminder of everything he broke — Senku's safety, Xeno's peace, the fragile rhythm they built together.

He sat at the counter, untouched whiskey glass in hand, staring at his phone.
Dozens of unread messages — from Lucas, McLaren, reporters.
He ignored them all.

Instead, his thumb hovered over Xeno's name again and again.
He didn't call.
He didn't have the right to.

Finally, he opened the news instead. Maybe he just needed distraction.

And there it was — a headline that made his chest feel like it caved in:

"Dr. Xeno Wingfield Returns to NASA: A Visionary Reinstated After a Year Away."

The article's cover photo hit harder than he expected — Xeno in his white coat again, standing beside the NASA emblem, shaking hands with executives. Calm. Composed. Brilliant. Like nothing happened.

Stanley scrolled through the article, fingers trembling slightly.

"After a short hiatus, Dr. Wingfield has resumed his leadership in several astrophysics projects. Known for his sharp intellect and groundbreaking theories, his return marks NASA's

renewed commitment to scientific excellence."

Not a single mention of Senku.
Not a word about the custody battle.
Not even a hint of pain.

It was like that part of his life — of their life — had been erased.

Stanley shut his phone off and sat back, the silence swallowing him whole.
He tried to tell himself it was good — that Xeno was moving on, doing what he was meant to do.
But all he felt was hollow.

He ran a hand over his face, the exhaustion heavy in his bones.
He remembered Xeno's voice when he said it wasn't your fault,
but it didn't help.
Because deep down, he still believed it was.

He looked toward the window, the reflection of the city blinking like distant stars.
He wondered if Xeno was staring at the same kind of view back in Houston or D.C. or wherever NASA sent him now — somewhere far, unreachable.

Stanley whispered to the empty room,

"Like nothing happened, huh?"

The words cracked halfway through.

He poured the whiskey, finally, and drank. It burned all the way down, but not enough to make him forget the way Xeno's eyes looked — red, trembling, human — the last night they spoke.

He set the glass down, closed his eyes, and laughed under his breath, bitterly.

"Guess I was just a neighbor."

Chapter 35: The New Wind

Stanley hadn't even had coffee yet when the call came through.
McLaren's logo blinked on his phone screen — the kind of call no one in the racing world ever ignores.

"Mr. Snyder, we need you at headquarters. Now."

He didn't ask questions. He just threw on his jacket, grabbed his keys, and drove.
The penthouse felt even colder when he left, but he didn't look back.

When he stepped into McLaren's glass-lined meeting hall, the tension was already thick in the air. The team manager, a few engineers, and Lucas were gathered around the long table. Beside them stood a man he hadn't seen in years — Brody, his current partner, looking as confused as he was.

"Lucas," Stanley said, his voice sharp. "What the hell's going on?"

Lucas didn't answer immediately. He glanced at the higher-ups, then back at Stanley.
"There's been a…restructuring. A change in driver lineup for the coming races."

Brody frowned. "A change? I thought we were confirmed for the whole circuit."

"You were," Lucas said, carefully. "But McLaren's board just made an executive decision this morning. Brody, you're being reassigned to test operations."

Stanley blinked. "What?"
His voice carried through the room like a crack of thunder.

Brody looked stunned, frozen with the resignation papers in hand. "Stanley— I didn't even— they told me just now."

Stanley turned to Lucas. "You're kidding, right? Who the hell's replacing him? We've been partners for years—"

The door opened before Lucas could reply.

A man stepped in — lean, tall, wearing a half-buttoned shirt, his golden hair catching the morning light. A smirk played on his lips as he surveyed the room like it already belonged to him.

"Ryusui Nanami," he introduced himself, voice smooth and confident. "I'll be taking the other car next to yours, Snyder. Hope you don't mind the change of pace."

Stanley's stomach dropped.
He knew that name.

A prodigy sailor, billionaire heir, and media darling. The man who once claimed he could "tame any engine, land or sea."
And now, somehow, he was in Stanley's sport.

Stanley's hand curled into a fist. "This isn't a game, Nanami. This is Formula One, not a damn regatta."

Ryusui only laughed. "Oh, I know. But from what I've seen, you could use a little wind in your sails."

The room went silent. Lucas rubbed his temples.

Stanley took a step forward. "You don't just throw a rookie into a car at 300 kilometers an hour—"

"Rookie?" Ryusui interrupted, smile sharp as glass. "Please. I've handled rougher seas than this. Besides, McLaren seems to think my instincts are worth betting on."

Stanley turned to Lucas, fury barely contained. "You let this happen?"

Lucas met his eyes but didn't speak. There was guilt there—something heavy and unreadable.

"Stan," he finally said, low, almost pleading. "This came from above. It's already done."

Stanley's jaw tightened. His pulse pounded in his ears.
He looked between Brody, standing helpless with his release papers, and Ryusui, standing smug with his new badge of glory.

It was too much.
Too fast.

Everything in his life was shifting again — Xeno, Senku, now this.

He grabbed his keys, muttered, "Unbelievable," and stormed out.

Lucas called after him, "Stan, wait—"

But Stanley didn't. He pushed through the glass doors and into the sunlight, his reflection blurring in the glass like he didn't even recognize himself anymore.

Behind him, Ryusui's voice echoed through the hall, amused and fearless:

"Looks like I just found my storm."

Chapter 36: Greed of brakes

Chapter Notes

> DOUBLE DSQ FOR MCLAREN ON THE VEGAS PRIX WAS NOT ON MY BINGO CARD I LOVE VERSTAPPEN TO WIN BUT DOUBLE DSQ JUST PAIN ME. ANYWAYS PS. MY FAV IS MERCEDES PETRONAS. Sorry for not updating dealing with my own personal shadows lollll no biggie tho

Stanley had barely adjusted his gloves before the new kid slid into the seat beside him with a grin that could blind a camera.

“Stanley Snyder,” the man said, leaning on the counter of the McLaren pit like he owned it. “I’ll introduce again. I’m Ryusui Nanami —your new teammate.”

Stanley rolled his eyes. The name wasn’t unfamiliar —Ryusui had been trending for weeks. The son of the Nanami shipping conglomerate, young, charming, absurdly rich, and with a personality that screamed trouble.

“Right, so yesterday wasn't a joke” Stanley muttered, shaking his hand briefly. “The sailor boy.”

Ryusui laughed, unoffended. “You’ve heard of me.”

“Who hasn’t?” Stanley muttered. “You bought a Formula 1 team for fun last year and nearly drowned your yacht the week before.”

Ryusui tilted his head, unbothered. “Adventuring spirit, my friend. If I can command the sea, why not the track?”

Stanley smirked, half amused, half irritated. “Because the sea doesn’t hit back at 300 kilometers an hour.”

Ryusui just smiled wider. “Then I guess that’s why I need you, Stanley. Someone who knows how to dance with death and make it look like art.”

The words were too smooth, too practiced — and somehow, too close.
Stanley stepped back slightly, giving him a side look. “You talk too much for a rookie.”

“Maybe,” Ryusui said, tapping his chin. “Or maybe I just finally met someone worth talking to.”

Stanley didn’t reply. Instead, he adjusted his gloves again and walked toward his car.
But Ryusui followed, hands in his pockets, a predator disguised as a peacock.

“I’ve admired you for years, you know?” Ryusui continued casually. “Your Monaco win, your Silverstone recovery — even that crash in Spain. You made it look poetic. I guess that’s what greed is — wanting something so badly it burns.”

Stanley stopped mid-step. “Greed?”

Ryusui’s grin curved dangerously. “Yeah. I want to race like you. I want to beat you. And, well—” he tilted his head, blue eyes gleaming like sapphire under the sun, “I want you to notice me too.”

Stanley blinked, unsure whether to laugh or call security. “You’ve got issues, kid.”

Ryusui chuckled, brushing imaginary dust from his sleeve. “Maybe. But every great man does.”

He winked and strolled off toward his own car, leaving Stanley standing there, half-confused, half-annoyed — and deeply unsettled.

Later that afternoon, he found Lucas in the garage, adjusting some documents with the engineers.

“Lucas,” he started flatly. “Your new driver’s too friendly.”

Lucas didn’t even look up. “You mean Ryusui? That’s his default setting.”

“No,” Stanley pressed, “I mean too friendly. He keeps talking about greed, admiration, and —” he rubbed the back of his neck, exhaling sharply, “—whatever it is, it’s not just racing talk.”

Lucas sighed, finally glancing up. “Stan, relax. Ryusui’s a bit eccentric, sure, but he’s not a bad kid. His record from the tests shows he’s fast — really fast. On par with you.”

Stanley froze. “On par with me?”

Lucas nodded. “He’s raw, but he’s got instincts. He’s the kind of reckless genius that either burns out or takes the crown.”

Stanley leaned back against the wall, crossing his arms. “So, what, he’s another spoiled nepo baby with good PR?”

Lucas shook his head. “No. He’s a rich kid, sure. But he earned his seat. He’s hungry — and you should know how dangerous hungry men are.”

Stanley stared through the pit window where Ryusui stood talking animatedly with the engineers, his laughter echoing through the metallic hum of the garage. The younger driver’s energy filled every corner of the room — bold, magnetic, too bright to ignore.

He didn’t like it.

He didn’t like the way Ryusui moved, like he already belonged here.
He didn’t like that Lucas compared them.
He didn’t like that Ryusui looked at him the way he once looked at the finish line — like something worth chasing.

Stanley muttered under his breath, “On par with me, huh?”

Lucas smirked faintly. “Looks like you’ve got a new rival.”

Stanley didn’t reply, but deep down, the old spark — the one that burned during every fight, every race, every loss — flickered again.

Rivals.
He could handle that.

But there was something about Ryusui Nanami that didn’t feel like competition.
It felt like a storm rolling in — beautiful, dangerous, and impossible to ignore.

The next few days engines screamed on the practice track — a familiar symphony that used to feel like home to Stanley.
Now every lap was a battle against the ghosts in his head.

He pushed through the first half of the run with deadly focus — perfect cornering, smooth acceleration, speed that made the engineers whistle from the pit wall.

But then —
A flash of memory.
A voice.
Amber eyes wet with grief in the moonlight.

“You’re just a neighbor who used to play with him.”

His chest tightened.

And his thumb slammed down instinctively — emergency stop.

The racecar screeched to a halt on the track.
Tires spat dust, engines hissed cooling air, and Stanley let his hands drop from the wheel, knuckles white.

Up in the control hub, Ryusui’s voice cut through the radio, confused and worried:

“Oi, Snyder! You okay? That’s the third time you dead-stopped like that today.”

Stanley didn't answer. He just ripped the helmet off, head down, sweat dripping — frustration boiling.

The fluorescent lights buzzed overhead while Stanley sat alone at a table, water bottle untouched.
Lucas approached carefully but with purpose, clipboard in hand.

“You’re off today,” Lucas said, lowering himself into the seat across from him. “Talk to me.”

Stanley stared straight ahead. “Just rust.”

Lucas didn’t buy it.
The team didn’t buy it.
Hell — Stanley didn't buy it.

Lucas leaned closer, voice softening.
“Any update on Senku?”

Stanley’s grip tightened around the bottle, plastic creaking.

Even the engineers nearby paused, pretending not to listen — they all adored the kid. Senku’s laughter still echoed in the garage if someone mentioned candy.

Stanley lifted the bottle and drank as if that would wash down the lump in his throat.
Finally, he spoke — clipped, emotionless:

“Why would I know? I was just a neighbor. Nothing to do with me anymore.”

Lucas narrowed his eyes.
“Right. You just kept the kid smiling for months. Took him everywhere. Nearly passed out when he broke his leg. Totally just a neighbor.”

Stanley slammed the bottle down, water splashing.
“Drop it.”

Silence stretched between them.

Lucas sighed and leaned back. “I’ll keep asking. Until you stop lying.”

Stanley didn’t respond.
He looked at his phone — again.
Thumb hovering over Xeno’s contact — again.

He typed:

How is he.

…stared.
And then deleted it.

He tried again:

Can we talk.

Deleted.

Tried again:

Do you have an update with Senku?

Deleted.

He shut the screen off and shoved the phone face-down on the table like it offended him.
His pride wrapped around his chest like barbed wire — the same pride that once kept him untouchable…
and now kept him alone.

Across the room, Ryusui watched.
Not nosy.
Not mocking.
Just observing.

The newbie leaned against a wall, arms crossed, those piercing blue eyes narrowing with curiosity — like he was assembling a puzzle no one else dared touch.

Back on Track

The sun dipped lower as they mounted again for more laps.

Stanley revved — determination fierce, jaw set.
He would not break again.

The cars blasted off — neck and neck.
Ryusui was fast.
Too fast.
Flowing through corners like he was born in a cockpit.

For a moment, Stanley felt the thrill — the hunger — return.
Rivalry lit his veins like fire—

Then he saw a small figure in the grandstand.
Black hair tied up.
A child's giggle echoing in memory.

His heart jerked — and he heard Xeno's voice stabbing through:

"You're just someone who used to play with him."

His chest caved—

STOP.

The car jolted violently as he hit the kill-switch again.
Dust clouded around him like smoke.

Ryusui sped ahead, then circled back, pulling beside him with a frown visible even behind the visor.

Stanley pressed his forehead against the wheel, breathing like he'd run a marathon.

He hated this.
He hated how much his life seemed to orbit people he wasn't allowed to keep.

Ryusui's voice crackled through the comms:

"Who is it you keep braking for?"

Stanley said nothing.

"Tell me their name," Ryusui pressed calmly. "I'll make sure they stop haunting you."

Stanley finally gritted out:

"Just focus on the practice, Nanami."

Ryusui didn't smile this time. His voice was low, sharp:

"A racer who keeps stopping… isn't a racer."

Then he drove off, leaving Stanley alone again with the track and his ghosts.

That night, back in the empty penthouse,
Stanley sat on the floor, back against the wall — helmet still in hand like a shield.

He unlocked his phone.
Opened Xeno's name.

Typed:

I miss you both.

He stared.
His finger hovered over Send.

…

Delete.

He tossed the phone aside and pressed his palms over his face.
It didn't stop the ache.

Chapter 37: The Return of Gravity

The cafeteria in McLaren's private test center was loud that afternoon — laughter, the clinking of metal trays, the hum of machines from the nearby garage. But Stanley barely registered any of it. He sat across from Ryusui, who had been talking non-stop for fifteen minutes straight.

"—and when I took the curve, I realized what you always said was true," Ryusui continued with a grin, pushing his food around with his fork. "It's all about trust. You don't fight the car. You dance with it."

Stanley, chewing on his sandwich, muttered under his breath, "You talk like you're flirting with a machine."

Ryusui leaned closer, elbow on the table, eyes glinting. "Maybe I am. Or maybe I'm just flirting with the man who made me fall in love with the track."

Stanley froze, sandwich halfway to his mouth. "Excuse me?"

Ryusui chuckled. "Relax, Snyder. You should see your face."

"Not funny," Stanley grumbled, shoving another bite into his mouth to hide the faint color rising in his cheeks.

Ryusui smirked, clearly entertained by the reaction. "Come on, you're the one who told the world emotion has no place in racing. That made me want to see what could break you. Now I know — a little teasing does the trick."

Stanley sighed, leaning back in his chair. "You're worse than the press."

"Flattery," Ryusui said with a wink. "I'll take it."

Stanley grabbed his drink and muttered, "You're insufferable."

Lucas arrived just in time to interrupt Ryusui's growing smugness, setting a folder on the table with a sigh.

"Alright, children," he said dryly. "If you're done with the world's most awkward lunch date, I have news."

Stanley rolled his eyes. "We're not—"

Lucas ignored him. "McLaren's bringing someone in to assist with telemetry for next week's full-system run. Our data's been acting up and misaligned acceleration-to-downforce ratios, a few signal errors, all that."

Ryusui frowned. "So, a new engineer?"

“Not new,” Lucas corrected, flipping through the file. “A specialist. Someone the higher-ups personally recommended.”

Stanley barely listened, focusing on finishing his food. Until Lucas said the name.

“Dr. Xeno Wingfield.”

Everything in Stanley’s body stopped.
The sandwich fell from his fingers, untouched.
The sound in the cafeteria dulled into a hollow buzz.

He blinked slowly, unsure if he heard right.
Ryusui, oblivious to the tension suddenly gripping the table, said casually, “Oh, that guy? NASA’s main brain? I’ve read about him. He’s the one who pioneered orbital simulation systems, right?”

Lucas nodded. “That’s him. Apparently, he’s consulting with our telemetry engineers as part of a crossover project. Don’t ask me how they pulled it off.”

Stanley’s heartbeat was loud in his ears too loud.
His palms were slick with sweat, though his face stayed composed, expression unreadable.

Ryusui noticed the silence and raised a brow. “You okay, Snyder?”

Stanley blinked once, slowly. “Yeah.”

Lucas gave him a knowing glance. “You don’t look ‘yeah.’”

Stanley forced a chuckle, trying to regain control. “I’m fine. Just didn’t expect that name.”

Ryusui tilted his head, curious. “You know him?”

“...Just a neighbor,” Stanley muttered automatically.

Lucas’s mouth twitched like he wanted to say something but held it in.

Ryusui, however, kept pressing. “Huh. Must’ve been one interesting neighborhood, then. NASA doesn’t exactly rent next door.”

Stanley stood abruptly, chair scraping against the tile. “I’m going to check the new tires.”

He walked out before either could answer, pace fast, his mind spiraling.

The hall outside the cafeteria felt colder than it should’ve been. His breath came in sharp bursts as he leaned against the wall, staring at the floor.

Xeno Wingfield.
After all these weeks.
After the silence, the distance, the things left unsaid.

And now he'd be here — in his world.
In the same building, breathing the same air.

Stanley closed his eyes, dragging a hand through his hair.
"Not now," he muttered to himself. "Not when I still look like a wreck."

He wasn't ready to face him.
He wasn't ready for the quiet disappointment in those blue eyes again — the same look Xeno had given him the day everything fell apart.

Ryusui appeared at the end of the hall, voice teasing but softer this time.
"Running away from lunch or from someone?"

Stanley shot him a glare, but the younger man didn't flinch.
"Your face says both."

"Don't start," Stanley warned.

Ryusui smiled faintly. "Whoever this guy is, he's got your engine running hotter than the track."

Stanley exhaled sharply, pushing past him. "You talk too much."

"Maybe," Ryusui said, following him with an amused tone. "But one day, you'll tell me what makes you hit the brakes like that. And maybe I'll understand what kind of man could get under your skin that deep."

Stanley didn't answer.
He didn't need to — his silence was enough.

Because for the first time in months, his heart wasn't racing from the thrill of the track…
It was racing because Xeno Wingfield — the one man he couldn't face, couldn't forget —was coming back into orbit.

Chapter 38: What Pride Wouldn't Let

The night before the McLaren invitation, Xeno Wingfield sat alone in his apartment — the one overlooking Houston's skyline, filled with cold blue light from the screens that never seemed to sleep. Papers, models, and data pads littered the desk, but his eyes weren't on any of them. They were on the email that had been sitting unopened for hours.

Subject: Invitation to Join McLaren's F1 Telemetry Research Program
From: McLaren Technical Board, London
Attached: Contract proposal and partnership terms

He already knew what it contained.
He already knew what accepting it meant.

The hum of his computer felt too loud in the quiet. He leaned back in his chair, running a hand through his silver-white hair, mind spiraling between logic and memory.

Logic said this was an incredible opportunity — direct collaboration with one of the most advanced engineering divisions on Earth. The funding alone could sustain his orbital telemetry project for years. His name would be attached to something historic.

But memory whispered something else.

That name.
That color.
That voice.

"Stanley Snyder…"

He said it under his breath like it burned to admit.

He had seen the articles — Stanley's return to McLaren, his performance on the circuit, the sharp interviews where his answers were brief, mechanical, distant. The man had gone back to the only thing he knew how to trust: the race.

And Xeno… he had been the one to break that trust.

He still remembered the words he'd thrown at Stanley that night — bitter, defensive, meant to hurt before he could be hurt himself.
"What is it to you if Senku is with my mother? You're just a neighbor who used to play with me."

The look on Stanley's face then — that flash of disbelief, then that slow retreat into silence — haunted him.
It was the kind of silence that said, I shouldn't have expected anything else.

He'd wanted to take it back a thousand times since. But pride was a crueler cage than any distance between them. Every time he tried to type a message, to call, to explain, his hand would freeze over the keys.

And so he buried himself in his work.
Simulations. Equations.
The same cold precision that once made him unstoppable now felt like penance.

He picked up the printed McLaren letter again, eyes scanning the words until they blurred.

"Your involvement will be pivotal in advancing telemetry integration between human and mechanical synchronization models."

He chuckled softly, but it came out empty. "Human and mechanical synchronization," he muttered. "How ironic."

Because there was a time when he and Stanley were just that — perfectly in sync. The scientist and the soldier. The strategist and the driver. The brain and the fire.

But that bond… he'd severed it with his own pride.

Now, saying no meant losing everything he'd built. Funding would be pulled. Projects would stall. People would lose jobs.
Saying yes meant walking into a room where Stanley Snyder would look at him again — if he even looked at him at all.

Xeno's hand trembled slightly as he reached for his pen. He stared at the contract line waiting for his signature.
He whispered to himself,
"Why does it have to be you again, Stanley?"

He closed his eyes, shoulders heavy. Then, finally, he signed.

When he leaned back, the weight of that decision didn't lift — it sank deeper.
He stared at the skyline, its reflection bleeding across the windowpane like ghost-light.

Tomorrow, he would have to face him.
The man he once admired.
The man he once hurt.
The man whose silence had echoed longer than any equation he'd ever solved.

And even though his pride still whispered, You don't need to explain,
his heart — the one thing he'd always ignored — quietly answered,
I owe him that much.

The next morning, the sun was sharp against the horizon when Xeno arrived at the McLaren testing circuit. The air smelled of fuel, burnt rubber, and the sharp tang of polished metal—so different from the sterile halls of NASA. The sleek orange and black of the team's colors

stretched across the pit lane, and for a moment, Xeno felt like an intruder in a world that used to belong to someone else.

He straightened his tie, hiding the exhaustion under a layer of professionalism. The hum of the engines roared in the distance—two of them, synchronized, dancing on the curve of the track.

“Stanley Snyder and Ryusui Nanami,” the pit engineer said beside him, trying to sound casual. “They’re the test pair now. Quite the combination.”

Ryusui Nanami.
Of course. The heir to the Nanami conglomerate. The name itself carried oceans of wealth and ambition—someone who could buy a seat before proving he deserved it.

And yet, when Xeno’s gaze landed on the track, he didn’t see Ryusui.

He saw Stanley.

The way he moved inside the car was unmistakable—controlled, instinctive, alive. Even from a distance, Xeno’s chest tightened. It was like watching a storm restrained by steel. Every turn, every line, every microsecond correction screamed a kind of artistry only he could perform.

But then it happened.
Stanley’s car slowed—again.

The brakes flared for no reason, dust rising as the test run cut short. The crew exchanged confused glances, whispering to each other. It wasn’t mechanical; the telemetry showed no faults.

“Third time this week,” one muttered. “He’s fine one minute, then just… stops.”

Xeno knew why.

He could almost feel it—the weight behind that hesitation.

When Stanley climbed out of the car, helmet tucked under his arm, his eyes flicked briefly toward the observation deck. He froze.

Their gazes didn’t meet—

Not yet.

Stanley turned away first.

“Dr. Wingfield?” a voice broke the moment. It was smooth, confident, and laced with the kind of arrogance that didn’t need to be earned.

Xeno turned to face Ryusui Nanami, who stood there with a towel slung around his shoulders, grinning in that way only the overly self-assured could. His golden hair caught the

sunlight like he'd been born for the spotlight.

"So," Ryusui said, crossing his arms, "you're the famous Xeno Wingfield, huh? The big NASA genius who made the call to work with us. Didn't expect you'd show up in person."

"I prefer to oversee my data directly," Xeno replied, keeping his tone professional.

Ryusui smirked. "Figures. Guess it's easier to face machines than people."

Xeno's eyes narrowed slightly, but he said nothing.

Ryusui took a step closer, voice dropping low. "Tell me, Doc. You the reason Stanley keeps hitting those brakes?"

That caught Xeno off guard. "Excuse me?"

Ryusui tilted his head, watching him like a predator enjoying the slow unraveling of his prey. "Every time your name comes up—or hell, when someone mentions NASA—he flinches. He cuts the run short. He acts like he's chasing ghosts."

The track noises faded for a second. Xeno's chest tightened.

Ryusui continued, his grin thinning. "You must've done something big to mess with a guy like him. Stanley Snyder doesn't stop for anything—crashes, pain, pressure—but the moment your name's in the room, he looks like he's driving through smoke."

Xeno tried to maintain his composure. "This isn't your concern, Mr. Nanami."

"Oh, it is," Ryusui countered, leaning closer. "Because I'm his partner now. And if you're the ghost making him lose focus, I have to know why."

For a moment, neither spoke. The tension between them hung heavier than the heat rising from the asphalt.

Xeno finally said quietly, "Sometimes, even the strongest engines stall when the heart behind them is broken."

Ryusui blinked, caught off guard by the unexpected softness in his tone.

Before he could reply, the pit engineer called out, "Dr. Wingfield! They're ready for telemetry calibration!"

Xeno turned, forcing himself back into his role. "Duty calls," he said, walking past Ryusui without another glance.

But Ryusui wasn't done. He called out after him, "Then fix it fast, Doc. Because whatever's between you two—it's bleeding into his drive!"

Xeno stopped for a fraction of a second before moving on, expression unreadable.

As he reached the computers and saw Stanley's data flashing on the screen, one thing was clear:
It wasn't just the telemetry that needed realignment.

It was everything between them.

Chapter 39: The Blur Between Them

The afternoon heat rolled thick over the track, shimmering in waves across the asphalt. Xeno stood behind the glass of the observation deck, arms crossed, posture straight but eyes distant. Down below, Ryusui Nanami was the picture of confidence — laughing, shouting orders, always too close to Stanley.

He watched as Ryusui handed Stanley a water bottle with a grin that was all teeth and sunshine. Stanley muttered something, half amused, half trying not to show it. For a fleeting moment, a small smile tugged at his lips.

Then it vanished. Just as fast.

Xeno blinked. The scene blurred for a second — the heat haze, or maybe something else. He brought a hand to his temple and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Dr. Wingfield,” Lucas’s voice came beside him, cutting through the soft hum of computers. “You alright?”

Xeno straightened. “Yes, I’m fine.”

Lucas gave him a look. “You’re pale. Been standing too long. You sure you’re not—”

“I said I’m fine,” Xeno interrupted quietly, his tone polite but tight. He exhaled, adjusting his tie. “Just… a little stress. A few things on my mind.”

Lucas didn’t press, though his gaze lingered with quiet suspicion before returning to his clipboard.

Xeno turned back to the window. His reflection stared faintly back at him — lined eyes, tired shoulders, and a heart that wouldn’t stop remembering.

Below, Ryusui had his arm slung casually around Stanley’s shoulders, pointing at something in the engine bay. Stanley brushed him off, but it wasn’t harsh — more of a quiet tolerance. Every now and then, Ryusui said something that made Stanley’s eyes light up, and that light made Xeno’s stomach twist before it dimmed again, the smile dying mid-rise.

That hesitation — that half-frozen expression — was unmistakable.

Even after everything, even after those words Xeno had thrown at him, Stanley still carried it. The weight. The silence between them.

Xeno’s fingers clenched at his side. He could hear his own words again — “You’re just a neighbor who used to play with him.”
He wanted to take them back. He wanted to erase the look Stanley gave him that day — that quiet, breaking confusion before he hid behind his usual defiance.

And now? Watching him from afar, pretending to be just another scientist with a clipboard while Stanley forced himself to smile for another man — it burned.

“Telemetry stable,” one of the engineers said beside him. “Dr. Wingfield, we’re ready for your input on the next run.”

Xeno nodded without turning away from the glass. “Proceed with the same settings,” he said softly. “No adjustments for now.”

“Yes, sir.”

His voice was calm. But his heart was chaos.

Down on the track, Stanley had started the engine again, Ryusui leaning on the side rail with that same easy smirk. Xeno’s vision wavered again — the blur creeping at the edges — and for a moment, he couldn’t tell if it was the heat or the ache of everything he refused to admit.

Because even through the roar of the engines, the crowd, and the distance between them — Xeno could still feel the truth beating behind the noise:

He had never stopped watching Stanley Snyder.
And it hurt to realize Stanley had never really stopped looking for him either.

The engines roared like thunder across the track, low and sharp, shaking the air with each turn. Inside the control room, the tension was thick — all eyes flicking between the monitors, telemetry graphs, and live video feeds.

Xeno’s gaze, however, stayed glued to one screen — the one showing Stanley’s car.

Something was off. The rhythm, the aggression, the precision — all wrong. Stanley Snyder, the man who once danced through curves like he owned the wind, now drove like a ghost behind the wheel. His grip was stiff, his acceleration hesitant. He kept easing off the throttle mid-turn, braking too soon.

“Sector 2 timing dropped by four-tenths,” one of the engineers murmured. “Again.”

Xeno frowned. “He’s not attacking the corner. What’s going on out there?”

He leaned closer to the comm mic, pressing the transmit button.
“Stanley,” his voice came steady, professional. “You’re losing consistency. What’s the issue?”

No answer. Only static.

He tried again. “Stanley. Respond.”

Still nothing.

Lucas glanced over. “He’s reading you, Doc. He’s just not answering.”

Xeno exhaled slowly, pushing his glasses higher up the bridge of his nose. He knew that silence — the kind filled with pride, with hurt, with a man trying to outdrive his own heart.

“Stanley…” his tone softened, slipping past the technical coolness. “I know you can hear me.”

A pause. Static crackled.

Xeno swallowed hard. The words came out quieter this time — not as a scientist, but as someone who missed him.

“I’m sorry. About… everything I said that day. The neighbor thing.” His voice wavered slightly, too human for the comm line. “You weren’t just that. I—”

He didn’t finish.

Because the moment he said it, the control room went utterly still.
Every engineer froze. Lucas’s brows lifted.
And from the other end of the line, Ryusui’s calm voice broke through:

“…Uh, Doc, you do know this channel’s open to both drivers, right?”

Xeno froze.

“What?”

“Yeah,” Ryusui continued, tone oddly quiet. “We’re both hearing you loud and clear.”

Lucas coughed awkwardly, looking away. A few engineers pretended to suddenly be very interested in their monitors.

Down on the track, Stanley’s car braked hard, screeching against the asphalt before coming to a complete stop near the pit entry.

The silence that followed wasn’t just radio static — it was humiliation and heartbreak twisted together in the same frequency.

Xeno removed the headset slowly. His hands trembled faintly.

Lucas placed a hand on his shoulder. “He heard you, Doc. That’s something.”

Xeno didn’t reply. His chest felt tight, but there was no taking it back now.

Stanley sat alone in the changing room, helmet discarded beside him, his hair damp with sweat and the weight of words he never expected to hear again.

“You weren’t just that.”

He ran a hand through his hair, exhaling sharply. He didn’t know whether to feel angry, relieved, or broken all over again.

The door creaked open — Ryusui's reflection caught in the mirror. The younger man hesitated, as if he had something to say. But before he could step forward, two engineers called out from the hallway.

"Nanami! Telemetry review, now!"

"What—?" Ryusui frowned, but they were insistent, pulling him gently but firmly away.

"Just a minute, I need to—"

"Now, Nanami."

He shot a last confused glance at the locker room door before being ushered down the hall.

Inside, Stanley sat still.

A few seconds later, another set of footsteps entered — quieter, slower, deliberate.

Xeno.

He stopped by the doorway, looking at Stanley in silence for a long moment. No white coat this time — just a plain shirt, his expression raw, unguarded.

"I didn't mean for everyone to hear," Xeno said finally. His voice was barely above a whisper. "But I meant every word."

Stanley didn't look up. His hands were clasped tightly between his knees.

"I know," he muttered. "But I still don't know what to do with it."

Xeno took a few steps closer, stopping just short of him. "Neither do I," he admitted. "But maybe… we can start by not pretending anymore."

The hum of the pit garage filled the silence — engines cooling, machines winding down, the echo of things left unsaid.

Stanley looked up. His eyes met Xeno's — and though neither spoke further, something between them finally started to shift.

Chapter 40: The Breakpoint

Chapter Notes

So i just got into an accident lol but i need tto post this so i hope you all are good and enjoying this

The locker room was silent except for the faint hum of the fluorescent light above.
Xeno stood near the doorway, his posture straight but his eyes uncertain — searching for a version of Stanley that would let him speak.

Stanley rose from the bench, his knuckles whitening. “You’re sorry? For the neighbor thing? That’s what you’re sorry for?”

Xeno opened his mouth, but Stanley’s voice hit sharper, angrier.
“You should’ve blamed me, Xeno!” he snapped, pacing. “Senku’s gone because of me! I was the one who took him to the track — I was the one who thought it’d be fine!”

His hand slammed against the locker, the echo cutting through the room.
“I caused this! And you—” he pointed, voice cracking — “you just said it wasn’t my fault. Like that was supposed to make me feel better!”

Xeno flinched at the rawness in Stanley’s voice. “Stanley—”

“No!” Stanley’s voice broke again. “You have every right to hate me, every reason to. But you didn’t. You went back to NASA, to your perfect life, while I’m still here—”

He stopped. His breathing trembled, chest rising and falling.

“…I can’t even hate you,” he said, quieter now. “I tried. God, I tried.” He laughed bitterly, shoulders shaking. “But I can’t. Because even when I tell myself you don’t care… I still look for you.”

The silence that followed was unbearable — two men standing in the wreckage of pride and guilt.

Xeno took a slow step forward. Then another.
“Stanley,” he said softly, the name falling like an apology. “You were never the reason he was taken. You were the reason Senku was happy. The reason I remembered what it felt like to live outside equations and duty.”

Stanley looked up at him, eyes glassy. “Don’t do that. Don’t make it sound like I’m some—”

But he never finished.

Because Xeno closed the distance. The air between them broke first — all that tension, all that grief collapsing into one sharp, trembling pull forward.

The kiss wasn't graceful. It wasn't planned. It was years of silence breaking open at once — a collision of anger, longing, and exhaustion.

Stanley's hands fisted in Xeno's shirt, dragging him closer; Xeno's fingers found his jaw, steadying him as if the world would tilt if he didn't.

When they pulled apart, their foreheads stayed pressed together, breath mingling, heavy and uneven.

Neither spoke for a long while.

Then Xeno whispered, voice low and breaking,

"You don't need to hate yourself anymore."

And Stanley, still trembling, whispered back,

"Then don't leave me again."

Outside, the track lights dimmed, leaving them in the half-dark — two broken men finding, at last, the courage to stop running.

Lucas had been leaning against the wall outside the changing room only because the engineers had told him to "give Stanley a minute."
Just a minute.
Just enough time for him to calm down.

But instead, he heard voices.

Xeno's at first — low, careful, trembling at the edges.
Then Stanley's — raw, cracking, his emotions too big for the sterile walls to contain.

Lucas didn't mean to listen.
But the pain in Stanley's voice froze him in place.

"Blame me more, Xeno! Just— just blame me! It's my fault Senku got taken from you. It's my fault you lost him. And I can't— I can't hate you for it, so I blamed myself instead!"

Lucas closed his eyes.

Xeno's reply was barely above a whisper.
"Stanley… I never wanted to hurt you. I never meant those words."

There was silence.
Then breathless stumbling.
A choked sound.

A soft impact — bodies meeting halfway.
A hungry, desperate kiss.

Lucas's fingers dug into his palms.

He had known Stanley for years.
He had seen him crash, break bones, lose championships, face down press and pressure and impossible expectations.

But he had never heard him sound like that before.

And right then, something inside Lucas splintered.

He couldn't do this anymore.
He couldn't follow her orders.
He couldn't keep letting Stanley's mother twist his loyalty into a leash.

As long as he stayed in McLaren…
As long as he served as a bridge between Stanley and the Snyder empire…
He was a weapon she could use.

Lucas opened his eyes.
No more.

He stepped away from the door.
Every footstep felt like tearing off shackles.

He walked out of the building without a single word to anyone.
Past the teams.
Past the engineers.
Past Ryusui, who was still confused about being dragged away earlier.
Past the roaring party music he could no longer stomach.

When he got to the parking lot, he finally let out a breath.
A heavy one.
Like the first breath after years underwater.

He drove.
Fast.
Reckless.
Angry.

The night blurred past—
City lights sliding across the windshield like streaks of gold and cold white.

He didn't stop until he reached the Snyder corporate tower.
Tall.
Cold.

Intimidating.
Exactly like the woman who ruled it from the top floor.

He took the elevator without waiting.
His reflection in the mirrored walls looked drained, furious, and older than the last time he checked.

When the doors opened, he walked straight through the executive lobby.

“Sir, Mr. Lucas, you can’t just—!”
The secretary ran after him.

Lucas didn’t even slow down.

He pushed open the heavy double doors to her office with a force that made them slam against the walls—

And then he froze.

Chapter 41: Momentum

Chapter Notes

> I'm okay just that my knee and right arm hurts plus this one is a stash away like I did this first before the other chapters HAHAHAHAHAHA youll know why

Ryusui had been on his way back to the garage when he saw them.

Stanley, hair messy, still flushed from the argument, eyes sharp like he'd just stepped out of a storm.

And Xeno — lips swollen, breath uneven, collar slightly crooked.

Ryusui blinked.

Then blinked again.

"What—" he began, but Stanley didn't even let him finish.

He walked straight toward Xeno, grabbed his wrist, and pulled him with a firmness that made the entire engineering staff go silent.

Xeno almost stumbled.
Ryusui's brows shot up.
The air snapped with tension.

"Stanley?" Xeno murmured, breathless. "What are you—"

"We need to talk," Stanley said, not even looking back.

Ryusui stared after them, completely confused.
"What the hell just happened?" he muttered, glancing at the engineers—
only for Xeno to give him one small side glance.

Just one.

The type that silently said:

"Not now."

Ryusui actually stepped back.
He had never seen Xeno Wingfield look like that—
flushed, shaken, pulled out of orbit.

And Stanley?
He was a man on a mission.

They reached the car.
Stanley opened the passenger door and Xeno got in without a single question.

Not a word was spoken.

Stanley drove fast—
but with the kind of precision that told Xeno he wasn't reckless.
He just needed to move.

The city rushed by in streaks of white and gold.
Xeno watched him in the reflection of the window — jaw tight, eyes forward, knuckles white around the steering wheel.

Only when they stopped in the basement parking of a luxury building did Xeno finally speak.

"Stanley," Xeno said quietly, "where are you taking me?"

Stanley didn't answer.

He stepped out, walked around, opened Xeno's door, and held out his hand.

Xeno took it.

They entered the elevator.
The metal doors closed, sealing them in a small world of humming lights and ragged breathing.

Xeno looked sideways at him.

"You're not saying anything," he said. "Are you… angry at me again?"

Stanley didn't look at him.
He kept his eyes forward, chest rising and falling too fast.

Xeno's voice softened.
"…Stanley?"

A ding.

The elevator opened.

Penthouse floor.

Xeno stopped just outside the door, confused.

"Why are we here?" he asked, breath unsteady. "Stanley—"

Stanley turned.
One swift motion.
No hesitation this time.

He grabbed Xeno by the waist, pulled him forward, and kissed him.

A deep, fierce, unthinking kiss—
the kind that burns through restraint, through pride, through every wall they built in the last four months.

Xeno made a small sound against his lips, fingers curling into Stanley's shirt as he pressed back.

Stanley held him tighter.

He didn't speak.
Didn't explain.
Didn't justify.

He just kissed him like he'd been starving since the moment Xeno walked away.

And Xeno kissed him back like he finally, finally stopped running.

The door to the penthouse slammed shut behind them.

Stanley didn't bother with lights.
Moonlight through the floor-to-ceiling windows was enough—silver on Xeno's white hair, silver on the tremor in his hands.

Stanley backed him against the nearest wall, palms sliding up Xeno's sides, slow, deliberate.
Checking.
Always checking.

"Tell me if it's too much," he whispered against Xeno's mouth, voice rough but gentle. "Any second. Say the word and I stop."

Xeno's answer was to fist Stanley's shirt and drag him down into another kiss—hungry, shaking, four months of want breaking open all at once.

Stanley groaned into it, lifting Xeno easily.
Xeno's legs wrapped around his waist on instinct, ankles locking, breath hitching when he felt how hard Stanley already was.

Bedroom.
Three strides.
Stanley lowered him onto the sheets like something precious, following him down, mouth never leaving Xeno's throat.

Buttons scattered.
Shirts gone.

Stanley's undercut brushed Xeno's cheek as he kissed down his chest, slow, reverent—tongue tracing every sharp line of muscle he'd memorized months ago and never touched.

Xeno arched, fingers threading through blond strands.
"Stanley—"

"I've got you," Stanley murmured, lips against his hipbone. "I've got you."

He took his time.
Mouth, fingers, low murmured praise—every inch of Xeno worshipped until Xeno was trembling, thighs falling open, black eyes glassy with need.

When Stanley finally slicked his fingers and pressed one inside, Xeno tensed, breath catching sharp.

Stanley froze.
"Xeno. Look at me."

Xeno's lashes fluttered. He met those almond eyes—steady, patient, burning.

"Breathe," Stanley said softly. "Push against me if you need to. I'm not moving until you're ready."

Xeno exhaled shakily, nodding.
Stanley waited.
Only when Xeno rocked down himself did Stanley curl his finger, gentle, searching—there.

Xeno's back bowed off the bed with a broken moan.

"Good?" Stanley asked, voice strained with restraint.

"More," Xeno gasped. "Please—"

A second finger.
Slow scissor, slow stretch.
Stanley watched every flicker across Xeno's face, adjusting, soothing with kisses pressed to his inner thigh, his stomach, the corner of his mouth.

By the time three fingers moved easily inside him, Xeno was writhing, begging in that low, wrecked voice Stanley had only ever heard in dreams.

Stanley pulled back just long enough to roll on protection, slick himself generously.
He settled between Xeno's thighs again, lining up, one hand braced beside Xeno's head, the other cradling his hip.

"Eyes on me," he whispered.

Xeno obeyed, black meeting hazel.

Stanley pushed in—slow, relentless, watching Xeno's lips part on a silent cry.

He stopped the moment the head breached that tight ring, letting Xeno adjust, foreheads touching, breathing each other in.

"You're doing so well," Stanley breathed. "So fucking perfect—"

Xeno's hands clutched his shoulders, nails biting in.
Another shaky nod.

Stanley sank deeper—inch by inch, trembling with the effort of holding back—until he was fully seated, hips flush against Xeno's.

They stayed like that, joined, shaking.

Then Xeno rolled his hips—small, testing—and moaned Stanley's name like a prayer.

Stanley lost the last of his restraint.

He pulled back and thrust in again, deep, controlled—finding the angle that made Xeno cry out and cling harder.
Again.
Again.
Slow at first, letting Xeno feel every drag, every thick slide—then faster when Xeno started moving with him, heels digging into Stanley's back, urging him deeper.

Stanley shifted, hooking one of Xeno's legs higher over his elbow, opening him wider.
The new angle punched a sharp, desperate sound from Xeno's throat on every thrust.

"Like that?" Stanley rasped, sweat dripping from his temple onto Xeno's chest. "Tell me—"

"Yes—God, yes—don't stop—"

Stanley didn't.
He drove into him hard, steady, relentless—watching Xeno fall apart beneath him, white hair fanned across the pillow, mouth open on broken gasps and pleas.

When Xeno's hand scrambled between them, trying to stroke himself, Stanley batted it away gently and wrapped his own fingers around him instead—tight, perfect pressure.

Xeno came with a choked sob, clenching hard around Stanley, whole body seizing as he spilled over Stanley's fist and his own stomach.

Stanley followed seconds later—burying himself deep, groaning Xeno's name against his neck as he pulsed inside him, arms shaking with the force of it.

They stayed locked together, breathing ragged, hearts hammering against each other.

Only when the aftershocks faded did Stanley ease out carefully, tying off the condom and tossing it aside.

He gathered Xeno close immediately—pulling him half on top of his chest, one hand stroking through damp white strands, the other tracing soothing circles on his back.

Xeno was trembling—tiny aftershocks, overwhelmed.

Stanley pressed soft kisses to his temple, his closed eyelids, the corner of his mouth.

“You okay?” he whispered. “Talk to me, Xee.”

Xeno made a small, wrecked sound—half laugh, half sob—and buried his face in Stanley’s neck.

Stanley’s arms tightened, fierce and tender all at once.

Chapter 42: The Morning After

Chapter Notes

Forgot to update lolll but have fun

Stanley woke up with Xeno half on his chest—
hair tousled, lips slightly parted, wearing nothing but one of Stanley's blankets tangled around his waist.

For a moment, all he did was stare.

This was real.
Not a fever dream, not a fantasy he refused to acknowledge.
Xeno Wingfield — brilliant, stubborn, infuriating Xeno — was asleep in his bed.

When Stanley's phone buzzed, vibrating insistently on the nightstand, he didn't even reach for it.

It was Lucas.

It was always Lucas.

But the moment he imagined going to practice after last night—
after kissing Xeno senseless,
after Xeno whispering his name between gasps,
after the soft, exhausted way Xeno clung to him until they both passed out—

Stanley grabbed the phone, pressed it to his ear, and said:

"I'm not coming today."

Silence on the other end.

"…What?" Lucas asked, baffled. "Stanley, you never skip practice."

"I know."

"Is this about yesterday? Did something happen? Are you sick?"

Stanley looked down at Xeno curled against him.

"…No. I'm fine."

Ryusui's voice suddenly cut in from the background, too loud for someone who shouldn't be in the call.

"He's skipping? Isn't this the last block before the race?"

Lucas muttered something like "shut up, Nanami."

But Ryusui wasn't done.
He spoke again, sharper this time:

"Why is he prioritizing this? Stanley never prioritizes anything other than racing."

A pause.

"Is it because of that guy yesterday? …Does Stanley like him?"

Stanley hung up.

He didn't care.

Not today.

A small shift beside him.

Xeno's voice, groggy and painfully soft:

"…You're awake."

Stanley turned his head just enough to meet Xeno's eyes.
Clearer now, but still tired and a little swollen from the night before.

"Yeah," Stanley murmured. "You?"

Xeno made a faint sound — halfway between a sigh and embarrassment — and sat up enough to pull the blanket tighter around his waist.

His hair was messy.

His collarbones were marked.

Stanley tried not to stare.
Failed miserably.

"Shouldn't you be at practice?" Xeno asked quietly. "Isn't that important?"

Stanley shrugged, completely unrepentant.

"I had something more important."

Xeno flushed.

“…You’re unbelievable.”

Stanley smiled lazily.
“I get that a lot.”

After a long moment of quiet, Stanley finally asked:

“Do you… visit Senku?”

Xeno’s shoulders stiffened immediately.

“No.”

Stanley frowned. “Is it because the court forbids it?”

Xeno shook his head.

“…No.”

“Then why?”

Xeno inhaled, slow, shaky.

“Because if I see him,” he whispered, “I’ll take him.”

Stanley froze.

Xeno’s hands trembled as he continued:

“I know myself. If I see Senku crying, or scared, or trying to pretend he’s fine… I won’t walk away. I won’t follow the court order. I won’t let him go back with her.”

He looked down at his own hands.

Hands that used to build rockets.
Hands that held a child who needed him.
Hands that were now empty.

“And if I take him by force,” Xeno whispered, voice cracking, “they’ll take him away forever. I’ll lose him completely. Not just custody—everything.”

Stanley swallowed hard.

“Xeno…”

“I can’t risk it,” Xeno said again. “I can’t be selfish. Not with him.”

Stanley reached out and took his trembling hand.

Xeno looked up, startled.

Stanley squeezed gently.

“You’re not selfish,” Stanley said. “You’re a dad.”

Xeno’s eyes softened with pain.

“Am I?” he whispered.

And without thinking, Stanley moved closer and wrapped an arm around him—holding him the way Xeno had held Senku countless nights before.

Xeno leaned into him, just slightly.

Stanley kissed his temple.

“We’ll fix this,” he murmured.

Xeno didn’t argue.

He just closed his eyes and let himself believe it for a moment.

Chapter 43: Low-Profile, High-Risk

Chapter Notes

So you can see f1 is quite the conservative type of sport soo

For a long moment, they lay there — Xeno sitting up against the headboard, Stanley half-draped beside him, their hands still loosely linked from the conversation earlier.

Then Stanley thought:

Xeno deserves one good day.

One day that isn't court hearings, or custody battles, or crying kids, or guilt, or NASA politics, or heartbreak.

Just one day that feels… normal.

Actually, a little more than normal.

A little special.

His pulse kicked up.

"…Xeno."

Xeno looked at him, eyes soft, still tired. "Hm?"

Stanley suddenly felt stupidly nervous —
and this was a guy who had faced 300 km/h crashes without blinking.

"Do you, uh," Stanley began, scratching his cheek, "wanna do something today? Like… maybe go somewhere? A movie? Or—stuff."

Xeno blinked.

Then narrowed his eyes.

"…Stanley," he said slowly, like he was solving a math equation. "Are you asking me on a date?"

Stanley went red so fast it felt like a fever.

"I—"
He swallowed.

His palms actually sweat.
“Y… yeah.”

Xeno stared at him for a beat.

Then…

Chuckled.

The kind of quiet, breathy chuckle Stanley had never heard from him — warm, almost fond.

“I didn’t know Stanley Snyder gets embarrassed,” Xeno teased softly.

“Shut up,” Stanley muttered, flushing harder.

Xeno smiled — a real smile — the kind he used to give Senku on the good days.

“…I’d like that,” he said.

Stanley’s heart jumped like he’d hit full throttle.

They went to a small cinema an hour later —
the kind hidden in malls where no one recognized a famous F1 driver unless they stared very hard.

Which was exactly why Stanley came prepared.

He wore:

a hoodie pulled low

sunglasses almost too big

and kept his head down like the world’s most suspicious celebrity

Xeno took one look and sighed.

“Oh yes,” he deadpanned. “Completely inconspicuous.”

“Look, if a photo leaks, it’s gonna be bad for you, not me,” Stanley hissed, adjusting his hood again. “I’m not letting the whole world jump you on social media. You already get enough crap from NASA politics.”

Xeno opened his mouth—
then closed it.

Because Stanley was right.

Attention was dangerous for him right now.

And Stanley was trying — genuinely trying — to protect him.

“…Thank you,” Xeno murmured, voice so faint Stanley almost didn’t hear.

Stanley froze.
Then pretended he didn’t hear it, because if he acknowledged that softness, he might melt on the spot.

They bought tickets.
Stanley nudged Xeno toward the corner seats in the back — away from wandering eyes.

Inside the dim theatre, Stanley hunched lower in his seat, hoodie shadow covering half his face.

Xeno took a sip of popcorn soda, glanced sideways, and whispered:

“You look like you’re attending a witness protection seminar.”

“Good,” Stanley hissed. “That’s the point.”

Xeno quietly laughed again.

Something eased in Stanley’s chest when he heard that sound.

The movie started — some sci-fi flick Xeno seemed interested in, judging by the faint gleam in his eyes.

Stanley didn’t even watch the movie.

He watched Xeno reacting to the movie.

Wide-eyed during the space scenes.
Squinting when the physics were wrong.
Whispering “that’s inaccurate” under his breath whenever the film abused science.

Stanley grinned behind his hood.

He liked this version of Xeno.
Relaxed.
Nerdy.
Alive.

Halfway through, Xeno leaned closer, voice barely audible:

“This is… nice.”

Stanley swallowed.

“Yeah,” he whispered back. “It is.”

And for two hours in the dark, it was easy to pretend the world wasn't waiting outside.

It was just them.

Chapter 44: Practice Day

Stanley came in late.

Not dramatically late—just late enough that everyone noticed. The garage was already alive with the early-morning atmosphere: metal clanks echoing, turbines humming as they warmed, the faint smell of gasoline mixing with fresh coffee someone abandoned on a toolbox. It was the kind of morning that felt heavy with work but promising with progress.

Lucas was doing inventory when he heard hurried footsteps. He glanced up to see Stanley rushing in, jacket half-zipped, hair still wet from a quick shower. His breaths were a little uneven, like he'd run from the barracks all the way to the garage.

But Stanley's eyes?
Sharper. Clearer.
Like someone whose fog had finally lifted.

"Someone's late," Lucas said teasingly, trying to sound casual but already assessing his mood, like he always did.

Stanley simply shrugged. "Overslept."

But Lucas didn't miss the faintest curve of a smile—calmer, lighter—as if some internal knot had finally loosened overnight.

And then the second piece of the puzzle came into view.

Xeno had been there since dawn.

He was crouched beside the car, half under the chassis, his white hair tied loosely, specs scattered beside him. He'd checked every bolt, every wire, every calibration twice now. He said it was "routine," but Lucas suspected the truth: Xeno woke up early because he was avoiding silence. Or maybe because that silence didn't feel heavy anymore.

When Xeno heard footsteps, he slid out from under the car on the mechanic's cart, wiping grease off his cheek with the back of his hand. His eyes lifted—

And he saw Stanley.

There was a tiny beat of stillness.

A moment too natural to be awkward, too soft to be nothing.

"Morning," Stanley said, trying for his usual cool tone.

"Morning," Xeno answered—quiet, warm, genuine.

No tension.
No invisible wall between them.
Just two people who had finally talked, finally understood, finally… reconnected.

Lucas's eyebrows shot up.

Oh.
They made up.
Finally.

He didn't cheer, didn't pry—just quietly smiled to himself as relief spread through his chest. The team felt like it was breathing properly again.

"Stanley! Ryusui! You're up in five!"

They boarded the vehicle—Stanley in the front, Ryusui sliding into the passenger seat like he was stepping into a private jet instead of a machine with exposed wiring.

The moment the engine started, everything clicked.
Stanley was back at peak—movements precise, instincts sharp. He handled the controls like they were an extension of his body, not a machine.

Ryusui noticed immediately.

"You're back to normal," he said, tapping something on his tablet. "Actually—no. You're better."

Stan didn't respond, but his grip on the wheel grew firmer, more confident. He accelerated through the course with the kind of fluid aggression he'd been lacking for days.

Ryusui smirked.

Yeah. Something definitely snapped back into place.

But Ryusui didn't miss the real shift.

During the first pit stop, as the car rolled to a slow halt, Xeno approached with the diagnostic pad. Stanley climbed out, tossing his gloves onto the hood, and without even thinking, he handed Xeno a bottle of water.

Directly into his hands.

"Drink," Stanley said.

Xeno blinked. "You don't usually—"

"Just drink."

Lucas, watching from behind the toolbox, slapped a hand over his mouth to hide a grin.

Ryusui took a long sip of his own drink and raised one eyebrow so high it practically hit his forehead.

“Well, well, well,” he muttered.

Then it happened again.

Mid-run, Xeno’s voice came through the comms:
“Stanley, watch the right incline. You’re leaning too close to the debris pocket—adjust three degrees left.”

And Stanley—who normally argued with everyone—just replied:

“Copy.”

No sarcasm.
No sharp remarks.
Just quiet trust.

Ryusui turned his head slowly.
Very slowly.

“Oh? So you listen to him now?” he said aloud, smirking.

“Shut up,” Stanley muttered, but the tips of his ears went red.

Ryusui almost choked trying not to laugh.

When the practice ended, Xeno walked over again to check the readings. He didn’t even say anything—just gave Stanley a small, soft smile.

Stanley tried to look unfazed.

He failed.

Completely.

Ryusui didn’t even bother pretending anymore.

He leaned against the car, arms crossed, and said loudly enough for Lucas to hear:

“Yup. Special treatment. Clear as day. I’m calling it.”

Stanley glared at him. “Call what?”

“That you,” Ryusui said, pointing a finger at Stanley, “are treating our resident genius like he’s—oh, I don’t know—your favorite person?”

Stan opened his mouth.

Closed it.

Failed to come up with anything.

And Xeno?

He just quietly turned away, cheeks pink, trying to pretend he didn’t hear anything.

Lucas, behind them, whispered under his breath:

“About damn time.”

Chapter 45: Later That Day

Practice had ended strong, and the whole team drifted home one by one. The garage lights dimmed, the engines cooled, and the noise finally mellowed into silence.

Stanley was wiping grease off his hands when his phone buzzed.

1 New Message — Mother

He hesitated before opening it.

Dinner tonight.
Family only.
Come home.

Softly worded. No threats. No sharp commands.
But Stanley felt his stomach drop anyway.

He closed the message and tried to breathe evenly.

Xeno, who was packing his tools in his neat, habitual way, noticed the shift instantly.

“You look troubled,” he said.

“Mom wants a family dinner,” Stanley replied, voice flat. “Tonight.”

Xeno paused. “Ah.”

Stan shoved his hands into his pockets. “So… I can’t cook for you tonight.”

Xeno blinked once, a tiny beat of disappointment flickering behind his eyes before he masked it with a polite nod.

“That’s alright,” he said softly. “You don’t owe me dinner.”

But Stanley shook his head.

“It’s not about owing,” he murmured, voice lowering. “I like cooking for you.”

FLASHBACK — One Week Earlier (After the Cinema Date)

Xeno’s stay in the country was supposed to be simple:
Three-week collaboration between NASA and McLaren.

Housing and expenses covered.
Routine, predictable, impersonal.

But nothing about Stanley Snyder ever stayed predictable.

It happened the night after the cinema date.

They were walking toward the temporary apartment McLaren provided for Xeno. The building was decent, modern, nothing to complain about. But the sidewalk was dim, and the night breeze carried a faint chill.

Xeno tugged his jacket closer.

“You sure NASA and McLaren don’t mind me staying there?” he asked, more to fill the silence.

“Yeah,” Stanley said. “But…”

He stopped walking.

Xeno looked back at him. “But?”

Stanley hesitated—rare, startling hesitation.

“My penthouse is too big for me.”

Xeno raised an eyebrow. “You never complained about it.”

“I never thought about it,” Stanley admitted, rubbing the back of his neck. “But yesterday—when you were there—”

He swallowed.

“It didn’t feel big.”

Xeno’s breath caught.

Stan stepped closer, avoiding eye contact. “Just saying. If you’d rather stay with me… it’s—uh—fine.”

Xeno tilted his head. “Are you inviting me to live with you, Stanley Snyder?”

Stanley glared at the pavement. “Don’t say it like that.”

“What? Truthfully?” Xeno teased softly.

Stanley muttered something unintelligible and looked anywhere but at him.

Xeno chuckled, warmth blooming in his chest. “If you’re offering… I’d prefer your penthouse.”

That made Stanley snap his head up. “Really?”

“Yes,” Xeno said. “I feel… safer there.”

Safer with you, he didn’t say—but it hovered between them.

And from that night on, Xeno stayed.

He learned that Stanley’s kitchen was spotless but barely used.
He learned that Stanley grilled steak perfectly, simmered soups expertly, and made breakfast with surprising gentleness.

Every night, Stanley cooked.
Every night, Xeno sat on the counter watching him.
Every night, the penthouse felt less like a place and more like a home.

And Stanley—who used to eat takeout over his sink—found himself looking forward to chopping onions because Xeno would hum quietly nearby.

Now, standing in the garage again, that warmth flickered painfully at the idea of leaving Xeno alone for the night.

Xeno snapped his toolbox closed and lifted it with both hands.

“You don’t need to apologize,” he said. “Go. Your mother requested it. That matters.”

Stanley clenched his jaw. “It doesn’t matter as much as—”

He stopped himself.

Xeno looked up. “As much as what?”

Stanley met his eyes.

“As much as you.”

Xeno’s lips parted, surprised—but he didn’t deny it, didn’t deflect, didn’t make a joke.

He only stepped closer and placed one hand lightly on Stanley’s forearm.

“Go,” he said gently. “I’ll be here when you come back.”

Stanley nodded, though reluctantly. He turned to leave—

—but not before one last glance at the man who had turned his entire sense of ‘home’ upside down.

Chapter 46

Xeno had just finished organizing the tools he borrowed from the engineering bay when his phone buzzed.

1 New Message
Sender: Unknown Number

He glanced at the preview—
his pupils tightening.

He didn't open it.
Didn't breathe.

Just turned the screen face-down on the table.

The sender's name lit up only for a second before the screen dimmed again:

The Snyder estate loomed in front of him like a museum frozen in time.

He stood outside the front door for a solid minute, hands flexing in and out of fists, swallowing the tightness in his throat.

Three years.
Three whole years since he stepped foot back here.

The air smelled the same. The stone path felt the same.
But Stanley… wasn't the same.

He finally pushed the door.

The hinges creaked softly, like greeting him after a long sleep.

Inside—

Every portrait of him from childhood lined the walls.

Baby Stanley drooling on a toy car.
Stanley age six, winning a local kart race.
Stanley age ten, missing a tooth with a forced smile.
Stanley in his awkward teenage years.
Stanley at seventeen, in his first racing suit.

It felt like walking through a shrine built for someone he no longer recognized.

He paused at a small picture frame on a lower shelf—
a worn photo of him and his first-grade classmates, all smiles in messy uniforms.

He remembered this day.

He remembered Xeno being beside him that same year, just not in this school picture.

His throat tightened.

Footsteps approached softly behind him.

“Stanley?”

His mother’s voice.

He turned.
She was standing there—elegant, poised, but with a softness to her features he almost forgot she had.

“Oh, sweetheart,” she said, rushing forward, hands reaching to touch his face, brush his hair, hold his shoulders like she was checking if he was real. “Look at you. You look thinner. Have you been eating well? How’s racing? How’s your health? Are you sleeping enough?”

It was overwhelming—an avalanche of care that felt practiced yet strangely genuine.

“Mom…” Stanley muttered, barely managing it.

She cupped his cheek, smiling too sweetly, too perfectly. “You never visit anymore. I’ve missed you.”

Before Stanley could respond, a low grunt sounded from deeper in the living room.

His father.

Arms crossed.
Expression flat.
Unimpressed, as always.

“You’re late,” he said, voice clipped.

Stanley stiffened—
the warmth from his mother evaporating instantly.

The two parents stood there:

Mother: soft, doting, almost pleading.
Father: stoic, judging, weighing him like numbers on a balance sheet.

And Stanley stood between them,
feeling like he was sixteen again—
and like he couldn’t breathe.

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